School Council Handbook

A Resource for Members of School Councils

1996

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Welcome *to your* **school council!**

As a member, you can help your council discover ways to improve the education of students in your school. You can also represent the views of others in the community and encourage their participation in the school. By valuing and respecting others' views, you can also help your council create a partnership among your school, the students' families, and the community. Such a partnership can help all students become well-educated, well-adjusted, and productive citizens. When the entire school community works together to support learning, children tend to succeed, not just in school but throughout their lives. Your participation in this process is crucial.

Use this handbook as a resource. In it you will find ideas and activities that you may select and adapt to meet your needs and those of your school council.

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Cette publication est également offerte en français sous le titre suivant : *Manuel des conseils d'école : Guide pour les membres des conseils d'école, 1996.*

This publication is also available on the Ministry of Education and Training's World Wide Web site at **http://www.edu.gov.on.ca**

Copies of this publication may be ordered by mail from:

Publications Ontario
50 Grosvenor St
Toronto ON M7A 1N8

Telephone: (416) 326-5300
Toll-free: 1-800-668-9938

The publication may also be purchased in person at:

Ontario Government Bookstore
880 Bay St
Toronto ON

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The Role of School Councils

School councils have been created to enhance students' learning through the co-operative efforts of parents, students, staff members, and others in the community.

Our schools are at the heart of the community. They have inherited a rich tradition of parental and community involvement in education. This experience, including the unique experiences and perspectives of the Catholic and French educational communities, forms the foundation for continuing community participation in education. The heritage of Aboriginal peoples offers a unique basis to encourage community involvement in schools.

This section will help you understand what your school council does, how it can improve learning for students in your school, and why it is important.

The school councils that are most effective have the following:

- **a focus on student learning**
- **a link to the school's priorities for growth and improvement**
- **an emphasis on promoting meaningful parental and community involvement**
- **the collaborative leadership of the school principal**
- **good processes for decision making**
- **a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities**
- **training for the school principal**
- **training for other school council members**
- **effective strategies for achieving a wide range of involvement from the entire school community**
- **knowledge of ways to effect change**

Adapted from Anthony Bryk, John Easton, David Kerbow, Sharon Rollow, and Penny Sebring, *Report of the Steering Committee Consortium on Chicago School Reform* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, July 1993).

The role and functions of your school council

Your school council is an advisory body of volunteers who work together to provide ideas and opinions to help the principal – and sometimes the school board – make the school a better place for learning. Your council should represent the diversity of the school community, which includes the parents and guardians of the children enrolled in the school and other people who live or work in the school's attendance area. It should give your community opportunities to discuss educational issues and respond to local educational needs by providing information for parents and community members, getting feedback from them, and presenting their views to the school and school board. It should help your school identify and respond to the educational needs of your community.

In its role as a link between the school and the community, your school council has two very important functions – to establish and maintain good communication among the school, parents, and community and to encourage parents and community members to participate in education.

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Council Membership

Your council should reflect the diversity of your school community. Parents and guardians will form the majority of members on your council (except in adult day schools, where parent positions will be held by students). Trustees and teachers can be elected as parent members of the councils in the schools that their children attend. Your council will select a parent to serve as the chair.

All council members are full and equal partners. They bring before the council the issues and concerns of the groups they represent and provide links to those groups.

This section outlines the requirements for council membership and the roles of the council members.

Composition of school councils

Each school council must include the following persons as members:

- parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school
- community representatives
- at least one student (mandatory in secondary schools, but at the principal's discretion in elementary schools)
- the school principal
- at least one teacher
- at least one non-teaching staff member

While individual school boards may wish to have additional members for their school councils, parents and guardians must always form the majority. Catholic school boards may also wish to have representation from the parishes within their schools' attendance areas.

Formal procedures

The procedures used for electing and appointing members are developed by the school board, which also determines if the term of office for council members is to be one or two years, although members may seek additional terms of office. School boards may also determine criteria for eligibility to council membership.

Elected council members identify the community representatives who will best serve the school. (See the section "Getting Started" for some suggestions on how to accomplish this.) Community representatives may include business people, senior citizens, labour representatives, and representatives of community support groups. The number of community representatives to be appointed may be outlined in the school board policy.

The role of each council member

Your role as a council member

As a member of a school council, you will:

- participate in council meetings and information and training programs;
- act as a link between the school council and the community;
- be responsible for encouraging parents and others within the school community to participate in education in your school.

Role of the chair

The chair of the council, who is elected by the council members, must be a parent as well as a member. In addition to performing the same duties as other council members, the chair:

- calls council meetings;
- prepares agendas for council meetings;
- chairs council meetings;
- ensures that minutes of council meetings are recorded and maintained;
- communicates with the school principal;
- ensures that there is regular communication with the school community;
- consults with senior staff members of the school board and trustees as required;
- organizes future elections.

Role of the school principal

As council membership changes, the one constant member is the school principal, who acts as a link between your council and the school. The principal:

- helps establish the school council and assists in its operation;
- supports and promotes the council's activities;
- asks for advice from the council in the areas within its jurisdiction;
- acts as a resource to the council on laws, regulations, board policies, and collective agreements;
- encourages the participation of parents and other people within the school community;
- ensures that copies of the minutes of council meetings are kept at the school;
- helps the council communicate with the school community.

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Getting Started

This section contains suggestions to help you get started. It includes the following:

- a list of items that might be included in an information package for members
- orientation activities to help you and the other council members get to know one another and become familiar with the council's tasks
- ideas for establishing guidelines to govern council discussions
- hints for setting priorities or goals
- procedures for appointing community representatives
- procedures for developing a school profile

Preparing for your role as a council member

An information package

To carry out your duties as a council member effectively, you will need to familiarize yourself with the school and with education in Ontario today. To help you, the principal or chair may prepare an information package containing the following items:

- a copy of Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 (see Appendix 1)
- information on the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and education in Ontario (see Appendix 3), the local school board (including the board's mission statement), and the school (including its mission statement and profile, if they exist)
- the board's policy on school councils and its guidelines and procedures
- sample by-laws and procedures (see the subsection entitled "Establishing some rules for the council" on page 12)

You will also need to know what to expect from council meetings. The first meetings, in particular, will be important in helping you familiarize yourself with the education system and your role in it. An agenda for the first and subsequent meetings might include some of the following activities:

- welcoming members and completing introductions
- helping council members get to know each other and start building an effective team through the use of an energizer (see "An orientation program" on page 12)
- establishing rules for meetings and the operation of the council (see "An orientation program" and "Establishing some rules for the council" on page 12)
- setting priorities or goals for the first three months, six months, or year (see "Setting priorities" on page 14)
- deciding how decisions will be made (see "An orientation program" on page 12 and "Deciding how to decide"on page 33)
- electing a chair
- assigning roles to council members (e.g., secretary, treasurer, member of subcommittee)
- appointing community representatives (see "Appointing community representatives" on page 16)
- learning more about the school
- developing a communication plan (see "Developing a communication plan" on page 21)
- establishing dates for future meetings
- determining training needs

An orientation program

The first meeting or two might be devoted almost exclusively to orientation activities. Appendix 4 contains a chart outlining activities that might be used for an orientation program. The following are some of the areas you and the other council members may wish to explore:

- **Getting to know one another.** Spend fifteen to thirty minutes on activities that build good relationships among council members. "Building a team" on page 27 also provides some useful strategies for team building.
- **Understanding our purpose.** Work in groups with other council members for about an hour to further your understanding of the council's and your individual roles. You can do this by studying Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 or your board's policy and procedures, or both.
- **Creating a vision.** Spend about twenty minutes sharing with other council members your views on the characteristics of an effective council. Then you can discuss the results as a group and begin to develop a group vision.
- **Planning for working together.** To help you build a cohesive team, as a group, use the activities outlined in Appendix 4 to accomplish the following:
  - identify the characteristics of effective teams
  - identify the qualities of good meetings
  - develop a group vision for the school council
  - learn about the stages of team development
  - review ways to make decisions and then decide how to make decisions in formal meetings of the whole council
  - review listening and presenting skills
  - share strategies for dealing with conflicts

Establishing some rules for the council

A set of guidelines or a constitution, or both, may help your council work effectively. At your council's orientation session or at initial meetings, you and the other council members should decide on the format and content of the rules of operation for the council. If your council chooses a set of guidelines, it may include rules related to the following:

- general expectations regarding meetings (e.g., attendance, promptness)
- the number and scheduling of meetings
- the number of members required for a quorum (the minimum number of people required at a meeting to reach decisions)
- a process for filling vacancies
- the duties of executive officers (e.g., chair, secretary, treasurer)
- rules regarding conflict of interest
- any requirements regarding signing officers
- the establishment and roles of subcommittees
- a process for seeking input from the community (e.g., by establishing an Aboriginal subcommittee)
- procedures for future elections

If your council decides to adopt a constitution, you may consider including the following items:

- the organization's name
- the organization's philosophy
- the purpose and objectives of the organization
- the duties and responsibilities of members and procedures for electing them
- the positions (e.g., chair, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer), terms of office, and responsibilities of executive members and procedures for their election
- the establishment and roles and responsibilities of subcommittees
- the number, scheduling, and quorum requirements of meetings
- the processes for making decisions and dealing with conflicts of interest
- financial procedures (e.g., signing authorities) if required
- the procedures for amending the constitution

Excerpts from a sample constitution and sample guidelines for a school council are included in Appendix 5.

Your council might also wish to examine rules of order and then adapt them for the council's use. While such rules sometimes seem too formal, your council will need some guidelines to allow it to accomplish its purpose within a reasonable period of time, while allowing all members to express their points of view. Sample rules of order are included in Appendix 6.

In addition to developing rules of operation – a set of guidelines, a constitution, or rules of order – your council should plan on the best way to make and formalize decisions.

Consensus is the preferred process for reaching important decisions. Your council may choose consensus because, while it takes more time, participants usually feel more involved and committed to the decisions. Your council can reach its decisions through consensus and then present those decisions as motions. The votes on the motions in this case should be unanimous. The subsection "Deciding how to decide" on page 33 outlines processes for decision making.

Setting priorities

Your council will have to set priorities or goals and develop a plan to achieve these goals. Many schools use the following sample planning framework to do this. You may wish to use it to get started. A sample action plan for a school council is also provided on page 15.

Sample planning framework

Areas to Be Considered	Things to Do	Ways to Do Them
1. **Values and beliefs:** What do we believe about teaching and learning?	Establish the values and beliefs shared by the members of our council.	See "An orientation program" on page 12 for suggestions.
2. **Shared vision:** What would an effective school look like?	Create a vision or mission statement for our council.	See "An orientation program" on page 12 for suggestions.
3. **Assessment:** Where are we now?	Review the areas of involvement for the school council.	Use Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 and our board's policy and procedures manual.
4. **Planning:** Where would we like to be in three months (or in any other specific time period)?	Select two or three priorities or goals to focus on in the council's first year of operation.	Brainstorm for a list of priorities. Then use the Nominal Group Process (see page 87) to select two or three priorities.
5. **Implementation:** How will we get there?	Decide how the council will achieve its goals. This might involve identifying committee structures, activities, information required, and evaluation methods.	Complete an action plan using the sample plan on page 15 as a model. Then implement the plan and monitor our progress at our council meetings. (Include the progress reports on our meeting agendas.)
6. **Evaluation:** How will we know if we are successful?	Determine the impact of the changes we have made.	Review our goals by examining committee reports and discussing whether they have been achieved. If they have, we can establish new goals and create a new plan.

Sample action plan for a school council

Key Areas	Activities	Timeline	Person Responsible	Ways to Measure Success
A structure for the operation of the council	1. Together with the other council members, discuss and decide on the components of a structure for the council.	Sept. mtg	Chair	The constitution or other structure for operation is developed.
	2. Establish a subcommittee to do the following:	Sept. mtg	Chair	
	• Gather sample structures, constitutions, and by-laws.	Oct. mtg.	SC chair	
	• Review each and identify areas that are appropriate.	Nov. mtg.	SC chair	
	• Prepare a draft structure for review by other council members.	Jan. mtg.	SC chair	
	• Submit a final version of the structure for approval to the council.	Feb. mtg.	SC chair	
Knowledge of the school	1. As a group, identify areas of interest.	Sept. mtg	Chair	Council members feel knowledgeable about the school.
	2. Choose the topics to be investigated and set timelines for presentations.	Oct. mtg.	Chair	
	3. Designate a member to request the participation of school staff in the presentations.	Oct. mtg.	Chair	
	4. Ensure that agenda time has been provided for each topic.	ongoing	Chair	
A communication plan	1. As a group, identify key issues to be dealt with and information to be shared in the first six months.	Oct. mtg.	Chair	The communication plan is established.
	2. Establish a subcommittee to do the following:	Oct. mtg.	SC chair	
	• Decide on the key audiences and messages.	Oct. mtg.	SC chair	
	• Develop the plan.	Dec. mtg.	SC chair	
	• Report monthly to the council.		SC chair	

Legend
SC = Subcommittee
mtg = meeting

Appointing community representatives

Each school council must define its community and then identify and appoint community representatives. This task will involve the following four stages:

1. understanding the community
2. identifying potential community representatives
3. outlining the advantages of being on the school council
4. deciding on a selection process

1. Understanding the community. A good understanding of the school community will allow you and the other council members to identify individuals in the community who will best meet the educational needs of the students. To learn more about your community, your council may wish to create and complete a chart like the following:

OUR COMMUNITY

	What do we know?	What do we need to know?	How do we find out?
A. Who makes up our community?			
B. What are the issues in the community?			
C. What are the strengths of the community?			

Your council can then develop a plan for gathering information about the community by creating and completing a chart like the following:

PLAN FOR GATHERING INFORMATION

What do we need to know about the community?	How will we get the information?	Who will get the information?	When will the information be obtained?

2. Identifying potential community representatives. The purpose of appointing community representatives to the school council is to obtain support and help from the wider community. People from varied backgrounds who can tap into a vast network of resources will be able to support the school best. Your council's choice of representatives to be appointed should reflect the school's needs and the availability of needed resources in the community. Your council may wish to consider representatives from the following examples of groups:

- employer groups or associations, such as the board of trade or Chamber of Commerce (These groups are particularly important at the secondary school level.)
- social agencies
- health-care service organizations
- non-profit organizations (You may wish to consider a person with experience in recruiting volunteers.)
- senior citizens' groups
- Aboriginal communities, First Nations, Friendship Centres, Aboriginal community-service agencies
- religious or faith groups
- the parks and recreation department
- cultural agencies and arts groups (e.g., art galleries, theatres, musical groups)
- service clubs
- business and industry groups
- labour groups (e.g., the local labour council)
- neighbourhood representatives
- the Federation of Agriculture Community Club

Questions like the following can help you identify possible community representatives from the list of potential groups above:

- Who in the community can best support our efforts?
- Who can help make our council truly representative?
- Who in our community can help our school?
- Who has good links to diverse groups within our school community?

After examining the list of potential groups that could be represented on the council, you and the other council members can draw up a list of potential community representatives.

3. Outlining the advantages of being on the school council. Since the individuals invited to serve on your school council will be asked to commit a lot of time to the council's activities, they will want to know what they will gain from the experience. Council members need to be prepared to tell to them about the advantages of being on the school council. As a group, you might brainstorm for responses to the following questions: What are the advantages of being on the school council? What is the role of community representatives? You may wish to keep a record of the responses.

4. Deciding on a selection process. Before selecting potential representatives, your council must determine the number of community representatives required. (*Note:* It is essential that parents remain the majority on the council.) Then your council should determine how community members will be selected. The following procedure is one way of selecting representatives.

The chair or a council member:

- asks council members as individuals to identify (in order of preference) three possible representatives by community group;
- asks members to indicate the reasons for their choices;
- ranks the responses by the number of times each community group was selected as first, second, or third choice;
- selects the required number of representatives from those groups most often recommended by council members;
- ensures that members are satisfied with the results (e.g., asks them: Can you live with this decision?);
- selects alternative representatives to invite in case some from the first group are unable to participate on the council;
- invites the chosen community members to participate.

Developing a school profile

Some schools develop and publish profiles each year. If your school has not already done this, your council might be interested in helping develop your school's profile. (*Note:* Many school boards are developing templates for schools to use as guides in preparing their school profiles.)

Your school's profile may include the following:

- a mission statement or outline of the school's philosophy
- a description of the school's values and beliefs
- the school's development plan, including:
  - goals
  - successes
  - areas of focus (e.g., language arts, fine arts, science)
- highlights of the school, including:
  - practices
  - accomplishments
  - staff and student involvement in the community
  - staff and student achievement
  - special features
  - extracurricular activities
- facts about the school, including:
  - organization by grade and program
  - enrolment and student background
  - racial, ethnocultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity of the student population
  - number of students bussed
  - school boundaries
  - results of any surveys conducted by the school or board
  - graduation rates
  - success of the school's graduates in postsecondary education
- standard assessment information, including:
  - test results (school, board, and provincial results)
  - general results
  - action plans for improving results
- opportunities for involvement, including:
  - parental involvement
  - business partnerships
  - community connections
- other information, such as:
  - parishes in the school's catchment area for Catholic schools

Before helping develop your school's profile, you may want to learn more about your school and about education today. You can do this by asking the principal questions such as the ones below, by inviting school staff members and students to attend a school council meeting (perhaps to make brief presentations), or by attending school board meetings or special events.

Consider asking questions like the following:

- What do we want for our students?
- What is the school atmosphere like?
- How is work recognized?
- How do parents, teachers, other staff members, and community members perceive the school?
- What do parents and other community members know about the school and how do they receive information?
- What educational approaches will help our students succeed?

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Establishing and Maintaining Effective Communication

One of the main purposes of school councils is to share information with parents and the community and to seek their ideas and views. To be effective, your council should therefore establish and maintain communication with parents and your school community.

This section provides ideas and suggestions that can help your school council become knowledgeable about your community, work towards equitable representation of the diverse groups that make up the community, and establish and maintain open channels of communication.

Parents learn about their children's schools through the following sources:

- **conversations with their children**
- **their children's report cards**
- **the school newsletter**
- **parent-teacher conferences**
- **personal visits to the school**
- **teacher notes and phone calls**
- **conversations with friends and neighbours**
- **meet-the-teacher nights**
- **open houses at the school**
- **local newspapers**

Note: The order reflects parents' preferred ways of learning about the school.

Developing a communication plan

One of your council's first tasks will be to develop a communication plan. To do so, as a group, you will need to consider the following:

- the audience with whom you need to communicate
- diverse communication strategies and processes you can use
- persons responsible for developing the plan
- timelines
- ways of dealing with feedback from the community

To begin, you might discuss how well your council is communicating at present – the strengths and weaknesses of your communication strategies. Then you might compile a short list of the most effective ways of communicating. These might include the following (listed in the order generally considered from most to least effective):

- one-to-one or face-to-face communication
- small-group discussions and meetings
- talks to large groups
- telephone conversations
- handwritten personal notes
- typewritten personal letters
- computer-generated personal letters
- mass-produced non-personal letters
- brochures or pamphlets distributed by mail

The public learns about schools through the following sources:

- **local newspapers**
- **conversations with adult friends and neighbours**
- **radio, television, or the Internet**
- **school newsletters**
- **conversations with students**
- **service clubs and business associations**
- **personal friendships with educators in the district**
- **personal visits to schools**

- articles in organizational newsletters, magazines, or tabloids
- news releases carried in local newspapers, including various ethnocultural papers
- advertising in newspapers or magazines, on radio or television, and on posters, including those from ethno-specific communities
- other mediums of communication, such as billboards

In choosing communication strategies, your council should consider their effectiveness and appropriateness for parents from diverse backgrounds and for the audiences within your community. For example, to assess the audience you wish to reach, you might begin by asking questions like the following:

- Who needs to know this? Which groups or communities need to be informed?
- With whom are we communicating already?
- Is the school reaching everyone it should?
- What organizations and networks should we be reaching?
- Who are the leaders of these organizations and networks?

Next, you might decide exactly what you wish to communicate by asking questions such as the following:

- What does the audience need to know?
- What are we communicating at the moment?
- Is the information appropriate for the community's needs?

Finally, you might determine how to deliver the messages you wish to communicate to your intended audience by asking questions such as the following:

- What is the best way and time to communicate?
- How are we currently exchanging information with all the different interest groups in the community?
- How can we assess the effectiveness of our current communication strategies?
- What communication efforts are working/not working?
- Are the messages designed to suit different audiences?
- Do we have a contact person in each organization or network with which we wish to communicate?
- Do we promote two-way communication?
- How will we know that the message has been received?

Once these questions have been answered, your council can use the information to create a communication plan that summarizes all the information collected. You might use a format like the one in the following sample:

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Audience	Key Messages	Strategies	Person Responsible	Timelines

Promoting meaningful parental involvement

One purpose of the school council is to promote and support the involvement of all parents in their children's learning. This involvement contributes both to the children's success in school and to the quality of the school itself. Thus, communicating with parents and encouraging them to become involved should be an important part of your council's communication plan.

Different ways of involving parents are available to schools. Schools can involve parents by:

- helping parents establish home environments that support their children as students;
- communicating effectively with parents about school programs and children's progress;
- recruiting and organizing parents' help and support as volunteers;
- providing parents with information and ideas about how to help their children at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning;
- including parents in school decisions and assisting them in their roles as leaders and representatives;
- identifying and using community resources and services that strengthen school programs, family relations, and student learning and development.

In the communication plan that your council develops you should include the types of parental involvement most appropriate for your school. You might wish to brainstorm for ideas for each of the six types of involvement outlined above before choosing those that are most appropriate. Your plan should include:

- any successful programs and practices that your school and parent group provide or use to involve families in their children's education;
- ways of obtaining feedback from staff and parents on practices that might be improved or introduced;
- specific strategies to involve those families who do not participate in the programs provided;
- two to four priorities that your council will implement in the first year;
- ways of assessing the effectiveness of your council's communication strategies and revising the communication plan for the second year.

Developing outreach strategies

Communities contain a variety of groups of people who share common geographical, racial, ethnocultural, historic, religious, linguistic, or life backgrounds or experiences; people who share a particular challenge or disability; and people who share business, organizational, or institutional experiences. All these people have something to contribute to the school, and to be successful, your council must involve all of them to take advantage of their experience and their knowledge and skills.

It is expected that your council will work closely with the school in establishing and maintaining strong communication with these diverse groups to encourage their involvement in both the school council and the school itself. This section of the handbook provides some suggestions for accomplishing this.

Your council can begin by finding out more about the members of your community. To find out who makes up your community, what information your community receives and needs, and how information is presently provided, your council might consider questions such as the following:

- Who belongs to our community?
- What organizations and networks exist?
- Who are the community leaders?
- To whom does the school and parent group send information?
- What information does the school communicate to our community?

  Does the information satisfy all of the diverse needs of the community?

  What do the members of our community need to know?

  How do the school and the parent group currently exchange information with the diverse elements of our community?

  Does the school or the parent group have a contact person in each outside organization or network?

  Is two-way communication promoted?

Community outreach is a whole-school activity. It must involve all staff members, students, and school council members and should become a regular part of the school's business. The purpose of community outreach is to facilitate the continuous involvement of parents and community members in the school. Before determining which outreach strategies to use, you and other council members might consider the activities in which you would like to involve parents and community members, as well as the activities in which these people might be interested.

It is important to keep outside organizations and racial and ethnocultural groups informed. Your council might consider some of the following ways of communicating with these diverse groups:

- distributing newsletters and flyers to these groups
- inviting these groups to visit the school
- consulting with these groups on community issues and needs
- holding meetings of the school council or school events in various recreation and cultural centres
- using local translators for meetings
- advertising continually in appropriate languages in local newspapers and publications and on local ethno-specific radio and television
- encouraging leaders of diverse racial and ethnocultural groups to share information about the school council with members of their communities and to promote the involvement of parents in the school
- using voice mail to record messages about council activities in appropriate languages
- avoiding scheduling meetings on religious holidays
- designating council members to work with specific organizations or networks

Here are a few guidelines for your council to help make your outreach successful:

- Create an outreach committee made up of representatives of the diverse groups within your community. Hold sessions with parents and other community members to brainstorm for ideas for reaching others. Obtain specific information regarding outreach from everyone.
- Create and maintain a positive climate and attitude towards parents and community members among school staff, students, and your council.
- Treat every parent and community member with respect, trust, and courtesy.
- Make sure that there is some mechanism in place that lets parents and community members communicate what they want, need, like, and dislike formally and regularly throughout the year. Be sure to follow up on any complaint.
- Offer information, workshops, and support for parents to help them learn more about what goes on in the school and how they can contribute to what their children are learning at school, both academically and socially. Include parents in pertinent planning sessions.
- Invite community leaders to school events.

- Arrange information meetings for parents and community members who are not on the school council to let them know about your deliberations.
- Actively recruit parents to become involved in the school through teachers, other parents, and council members.

The Aboriginal community is an example of one community group that should be part of your school council's outreach. In this regard, it is important to reach out to parents and the community by working through the following on-reserve local groups:

- the First Nations Council
- Native elders
- the Native trustee on the board
- Native advisory committees
- the Native Education Authority
- community agencies

The following local off-reserve organizations are also good sources of contacts in your school community:

- the local Friendship Centre
- the local group of the Ontario Native Women's Association
- the local group of the Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association
- the local group of the Ontario Métis Nation of Ontario
- local Aboriginal councils
- local community agencies

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Holding Effective Meetings

Meetings are most effective when the participants trust and respect each other. This section of the handbook provides you with some principles and strategies that promote collaboration and co-operation. It also includes tips on preparing for meetings, getting the most out of meetings, and resolving conflicts and making decisions.

Building a team

Trust and respect are essential to allow your council to function effectively as a team. Trust is built when you and the other council members get to know each other's beliefs, values, interests, and areas of strength. An orientation session (see Appendix 4) prior to the first formal meeting will help begin this process. Brief energizers (see Appendix 10, pages 88 to 91) related to the main topics to be discussed are also helpful at the beginnings of meetings. Building relationships among council members in these ways will strengthen your team and promote teamwork. As trust and respect develop, you and the other members will likely be more open to sharing opinions, taking risks, and resolving conflicts in a positive manner.

Another way to promote teamwork is to decide on the norms for working together. Taking the time to do this will improve the effectiveness of your meetings. Including the following three activities in your orientation session could be very helpful in building a team.

1. What will make our team perform well?
As a group, think back to a time when you were part of a high-performing team and brainstorm for a list of characteristics that led to your success. You might want to use the Mind Map (page 77) or Graffiti Board (page 75) strategy to do this. Then discuss all the characteristics suggested and develop a list of those that you all agree are necessary for an effective team. Post the list and continue with the next activity.

2. What should our meetings be like in order for us to work together effectively?
To build consensus on the way your group will work together, the activity leader (the chair or someone designated by the chair) will ask you to review a list of characteristics of good meetings, such as the list on page 28, and to add any other characteristics that you feel are important.

A meeting has been effective when all participants feel that:

- **the meeting had a purpose;**
- **they have a sense of accomplishment;**
- **they contributed to the discussion;**
- **they were valued by others;**
- **creative ideas, alternatives, or solutions were generated;**
- **they were able to share different points of view;**
- **they are committed to the decisions made and actions taken;**
- **they are willing to work together again.**

Characteristics of effective meetings

- ☐ Everyone listens carefully and communicates effectively.
- ☐ The atmosphere is friendly and sociable.
- ☐ Business is conducted in an orderly and efficient way.
- ☐ Members have a good sense of humour.
- ☐ Errors are admitted openly and honestly.
- ☐ Members are creative and suggest new ideas.
- ☐ Individuals show consideration and respect for each other.
- ☐ People praise each other frequently.
- ☐ Everyone is willing to compromise.
- ☐ Members remain calm and cool, avoiding anger.
- ☐ People follow rules and procedures.
- ☐ Members are frank in discussions, saying what they think.
- ☐ Everyone is honest and trustworthy.
- ☐ Individuals help and support each other.
- ☐ Everyone is independent and self-reliant.
- ☐ Members are punctual and responsible.
- ☐ People try to do their best.
- ☐ Members have the best interests of the students and the school in mind.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

You will be given three to five minutes to indicate the five characteristics that you consider most important. Then the leader will use a strategy such as the Nominal Group Process or Snowball (see Appendix 10) to choose the five or six characteristics that everyone agrees are essential. They will become the norms for your meetings. These norms will be recorded on chart paper and posted at each meeting to help your group get back on track when disagreement or conflict arises. These norms may also be used to develop a code of ethics for your school council.

3. How can we develop effectiveness? Every group goes through the following four stages* to different degrees. The length of each of the stages and their sequence depend on the team.

- *Stage 1: Forming.* Group members are polite, impersonal, watchful, and guarded.
- *Stage 2: Storming.* Group members are trying to avoid conflicts, confronting people, opting out, having difficulties, or feeling stuck.
- *Stage 3: Norming.* Group members are developing various skills such as conflict-resolution and listening, establishing procedures, giving feedback, and confronting issues.
- *Stage 4: Performing.* Group members are becoming resourceful, flexible, open, effective, close, and supportive.

It is helpful to know about these stages when you and your fellow members are feeling stuck, frustrated, or unproductive. But what can you do to move from one stage to the next? You might try using the Carousel Brainstorming strategy (see Appendix 10).

Four charts are posted with one of the following headings on each: *Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing.* As a group, brainstorm for strategies to support your council's work at each of the four stages. Then decide which of these strategies you and the other council members are willing to try at each stage.

Getting ready for a meeting

Efficient and productive meetings require careful preplanning and organization. The chair, or a person designated by the chair, can help ensure effective meetings by following the steps outlined below.

- Prepare the agenda before the meeting. Time can be allocated at one meeting to develop agenda items for the next meeting. The final agenda can be completed either by an individual or by a committee (including the principal, the chair, and other members). All council members can contribute to the agenda, possibly by using a chart such as the following:

MEETING AGENDA

Agenda Item	Person to Lead the Discussion	Time	Type of Issue (information, discussion, action; urgent, long-range)
•			
•			
•			
•			
•			

* Adapted from Margaret Arbuckle and Lynn Murray, *Building Systems for Professional Growth: An Action Guide* (Andover, Mass.: The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement and Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services, 1989), pp. 4-5.

- Identify priority items and schedule them at the beginning of the "new business" part of the agenda. For each item to be discussed, the time frame and the name of the person leading the discussion should be provided.
- Ensure that everyone has a copy of the agenda prior to the meeting. At the meeting, the agenda can be posted on chart paper and reviewed at the beginning of the meeting; any urgent last-minute agenda items can be added. A sample format for a meeting agenda is provided in Appendix 7.
- Create a comfortable environment that includes any necessary equipment for the meeting (e.g., an overhead projector). A sample planning checklist is provided in Appendix 8.
- Advertise each meeting to encourage other parents and community members to attend. To reach as many parents and community members as possible, it is necessary to know how information is circulated in the community (e.g., through local newspapers, ethnocultural media, community and school newsletters, local cable television, notice boards) and what form(s) of communication the members of the community prefer. This information may already have been collected when the council was developing a communication plan. Suggestions for obtaining this information and ideas on how to communicate with the community can be found in the section "Establishing and Maintaining Effective Communication".

  Some more ways in which the council can encourage attendance at council meetings include:
  - involving any existing parent group(s);
  - requesting a feature in a local newspaper;
  - circulating the dates, times, and locations of meetings at the beginning of each year and after each major school holiday;
  - sending information home with report cards;
  - using a lawn sign if local by-laws permit such signs;
  - posting invitations in local recreation, cultural, and religious centres;
  - providing child care;
    (Schools should be aware of insurance-coverage requirements if providing this service through the use of volunteers.)
  - inviting parents and community members that council members know.

Promoting good discussion and clear communication in meetings

Listening and discussing

Meetings are most successful and productive when council members listen and present effectively. The key to understanding is listening to and concentrating on what others are saying. A major barrier to effective communication is our tendency to evaluate before hearing what others have to say. Here are some tips to help you understand what others are saying:

- Give your full attention to the speaker.
- Think about what the speaker is saying and take notes, if necessary.
- Ask questions or paraphrase to clarify meaning (e.g., "Do you mean . . . ?", "What I hear you say is . . . .", "Let me see if I understand your point . . . .").

The following chart describes six ways you can promote good discussion in meetings.

Type of Statement	Purpose of Statement	Ways to Do This	Examples
Encouraging	• to convey interest • to encourage the other person to keep talking	• Neither agree nor disagree. • Use neutral words. • Use varying voice intonations.	"Can you tell me more?"
Clarifying	• to help you clarify what is said • to get more information • to help the speaker see other points of view	• Ask questions. • Restate your interpretation, if it is unclear, to force the speaker to explain further.	"When did this happen?"
Restating	• to show that you are listening and understand what is being said • to check your understanding and interpretation	• Restate basic ideas and facts.	"So you would like the council to reflect the diversity of our community."
Reflecting	• to show that you understand how the speaker feels • to help the speaker evaluate his or her own ideas and feelings after hearing them expressed by someone else	• Reflect the speaker's basic feelings.	"You seem concerned. Tell us more."
Summarizing	• to review progress • to pull together important ideas and facts • to establish a basis for further discussion	• Restate the major ideas expressed, including feelings.	"These seem to be the key ideas you've expressed. . . ."
Validating	• to acknowledge the worthiness of the speaker	• Acknowledge the value of the speaker's ideas and feelings. • Show appreciation for the speaker's efforts and actions.	"I appreciate your willingness to resolve this matter."

Adapted from Tim Kearns, Carole Pickering, and John Twist, *Managing Conflict: A Practical Guide to Conflict Resolution for Educators* (Toronto: Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, 1992), p. 71.

Presenting

Presenting and conveying information, opinions, and feelings clearly and succinctly promote good communication among council members. The following are some tips to help you present your point of view clearly:

- Think and plan ahead.
- Jot down key points.
- Avoid jargon.
- Seek feedback to ensure that everyone understands your point.

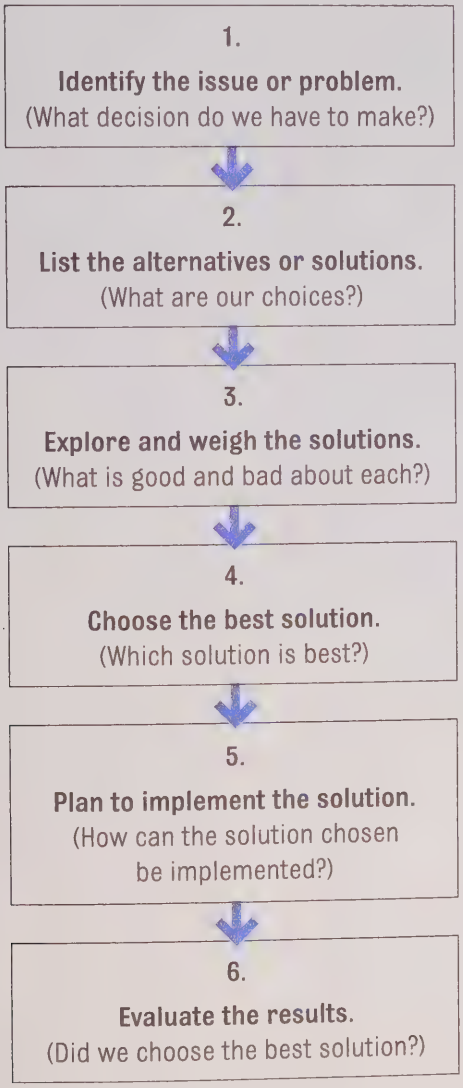
You may use the following checklist to assess your communication skills – your strengths and the areas that could be improved.

Communication skills checklist

I invite feedback from others to determine that what I have said is understood.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I try to understand exactly what I want to say before I speak or write.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I state my message clearly.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I make sure my actions are consistent with my words.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I consider the overtones of my message as well as the intended meaning.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I try to be aware of the attitudes and beliefs of those with whom I am communicating.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I am honest in what I say to others.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I listen carefully to what others have to say.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I recognize that what I am saying may not always be understood.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I avoid phrases that may be offensive.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I avoid speaking down to or over the heads of others.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I avoid using jargon.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I tolerate disagreement.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I try to encourage the expression of all points of view, particularly from those who haven't spoken.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I can be persuaded by the views of others.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I participate in discussions without dominating them.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I accept criticism of my work.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I express criticism freely and honestly.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I express commendation freely and honestly.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes
I try to phrase my messages in a positive manner.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Sometimes

Deciding how to decide

Your council will have to make decisions about the advice it will provide for the principal and the school board. The following are the basic steps in making any decision:



Your council's decision can be determined either by consensus or by majority vote. If you choose majority vote, you should all be well informed and, as a group, you should discuss all of the implications before a vote is called by the chair. While the vote will decide the issue, some members may feel that they "lost" and thus be less committed to the decision. So for decisions that are crucial to the achievement of your council's goals, **consensus is the best method.**

With the consensus method, as a group, you fully discuss the decision to be made, expressing your own ideas, listening carefully to others' opinions, and trying to find alternatives to which everyone can agree. Because you all participate in a consensual decision, you all have the chance to influence and understand the decision. As a result, the final decision is reached without conflict and will likely receive everyone's support. To summarize, consensus:

- gives you and all the other council members an effective voice in decisions;
- builds on differing perspectives and values;
- allows for flexibility in arriving at solutions;
- can result in better informed, more creative, balanced, and enduring decisions;
- ensures that the final decision has the support of everyone, thus promoting a sense of commitment to and ownership in the decision;
- creates a sense of common purpose;
- allows you and the other council members to maintain the integrity of your personal values while agreeing to a new solution.

Arriving at a decision that everyone can support requires time, a clear process, skill, and the full participation of all members. The following eight-step process is one approach your council might use.

The chair or a council member will:

1. identify the issue that requires a decision and make sure that everyone has the same understanding of the issue;
2. ask for your and other members' current views on the issue;
   (Solutions should not be suggested at this time.)
3. record the areas of agreement and disagreement;
4. ask for and suggest solutions that incorporate varying viewpoints and the areas of agreement;
5. lead a discussion on the implications, strengths, and weaknesses of each solution;
6. encourage everyone to suggest new solutions that build on the discussion that just took place;
   (Compromise may occur at this step.)
7. recommend the most promising solution and then encourage members to express their opinions by asking the following questions:
   - Could you live with this decision?
   - Will you support this decision?
   - Have we listened carefully to all points of view, particularly those that are different from those of the majority?
8. repeat steps 3 to 7 if the answer to any of the above questions is "no".

The importance of the chair in helping the council reach consensus cannot be overstated. The chair can help members reach mutual agreement by using language like the following:*

- Let's begin by getting a reaction from everyone in the group.
- Let me summarize what I hear you saying.
- Let me repeat what I think I heard you say.
- Let me ask you....
- Has everyone had the opportunity to express an opinion?
- Let me see if I can pull together a recommendation.
- Is anyone uncomfortable with this recommendation?
- Let's take five minutes to re-evaluate our positions and prepare statements to share with others.
- Do you want to ponder this question and discuss it again at the next meeting?
- Can you live with this decision?

Once a decision is reached by consensus, your council may choose to formalize it through a motion. The result of the vote should be unanimous.

Consensus takes time, commitment, patience, and persistence. As a process it will strengthen your team by building trust, valuing the diversity of opinions, and energizing and involving all members as equal participants.

* Adapted from Stephanie Hirsh and Mike Murphy, *School Improvement Planning Manual* (Oxford, Ohio: The National Staff Development Council, 1992), p. 23.

Resolving conflicts

Resolving conflicts in a positive manner should be a goal for any group, including school councils. When conflicts are resolved collaboratively, the whole group is strengthened, as are the individuals in the group. Since this section of the handbook provides only a brief overview of conflict resolution, you and the other council members may wish to seek training opportunities.

Conflict is often prevented, and solutions are best reached, when positive working relationships exist. Creating such relationships involves taking the time to get to know each other's values, beliefs, and interests. As well, establishing group norms (see "Building a team", page 27) and using good communication skills (see "Presenting", page 32) will help bring clarity to the way your group works and to discussions, thus helping prevent misunderstanding and conflict.

The following four steps are one approach to resolving conflict:

1. Acknowledge the conflict. As a group, acknowledge when a conflict exists and determine the source of the conflict. For example, is it related to facts? Goals? Processes? Values and beliefs? Communication?

2. Plan how to deal with the conflict. Once the source of the conflict is defined, you need to figure out how to deal with it. This may be done by your chair, another individual on the council, or the entire council. (In particularly difficult times, it may be best to engage a person not associated with the council to facilitate discussion and problem solving.) At this stage, all council members should reflect on the problem and be prepared to state their concerns and viewpoints.

3. Provide time for discussion. Your chair or other person facilitating the discussion introduces the problem and asks each member for input so that the nature and source of the conflict are clear. Acknowledging each person by listening attentively and giving them "weight" sets the tone for problem solving and opens the council to a variety of solutions. Emotions should be accepted and dealt with since they are a part of conflict.

4. Seek the best solution. As viewpoints and solutions are described, your chair or other person deals with them one at a time. The information can be organized on a chart similar to the one below.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Issue: _____

Positive Aspects	Concerns	Implications

Following the discussion, your chair or other person may use a process for building consensus, such as the Nominal Group process or Snowball (see Appendix 10), to arrive at a new solution. You and the other members will be asked the following questions: Can you live with this solution? Will you support the solution?

Depending on the nature of the conflict, it is sometimes best for you and the other members of the council to have time to reflect on the solution. The decision can be finalized at a future meeting. If the conflict cannot be resolved, as a group, you may wish to seek the assistance of resource staff at the school board.

The following resources on conflict resolution may be useful:

- Kearns, Tim; Pickering, Carole; and Twist, John. *Managing Conflict: A Practical Guide to Conflict Resolution for Educators.* Toronto, Ont.: Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, 1992.
- Fisher, Roger, and Ury, William. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.* Rev. ed. New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1991.

Increasing the effectiveness of meetings – the role of the chair

The chair's role in maximizing the effectiveness of meetings is crucial. Here are some tips for those who are chairing council meetings:

- Start and end each meeting on time.
- Keep opening remarks welcoming and brief. Introduce any guests, including all those presenting agenda items.
- Review the agenda with council members. Outline what is to be accomplished. Keep to the agenda and the timelines. If new business items are raised, record them on chart paper and carry them forward as agenda items for the next meeting.
- Remind members of the group norms established by the council at the orientation session. (See pages 27-28.)
- Consider using an energizer briefly at the beginning of each meeting to allow participants to get to know one another. Also, when the energizer is linked to the content of the agenda, it will help members focus their thinking. (For examples of energizers, see Appendix 10.)
- Ensure that minutes of each meeting are kept. (A sample is provided in Appendix 9.)
- Allow for individual and small-group input during discussion of agenda items, using a variety of the strategies outlined in Appendix 10.
- Remain neutral and provide alternative ways to solve problems or make decisions.
- Encourage decision making through consensus. If desired, use rules of order to formalize decisions made through consensus.
- Summarize each meeting, reviewing key actions and decisions. Check that all council members have the same understanding of any decisions.
- Review the time, date, and location of the next meeting and any items of new business to be included in that meeting's agenda.
- Assess the effectiveness of a meeting occasionally, using checklists 2, 3, or 4 provided in the section entitled "Assessing Your Council's Progress". Use the information to improve the effectiveness of future council meetings.

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Assessing Your Council's Progress

A truly effective team focuses on accomplishing its tasks and maintaining positive relationships among its members. However, to continue to grow, the team must also reflect on its progress.

By sharing your reflections, you and the other council members will be better able to assess your council's effectiveness and to determine the steps you can take to continue to grow as a team. The checklists on the following pages will help you identify areas of strength and areas for growth.

Assessment checklists

Checklist 1. Measuring the growth of your team*

From time to time, you might reflect on the following group characteristics and spend some time sharing your responses with the other council members. By rating each characteristic, it is possible to obtain a general picture of various members' perceptions of your team and the way it is developing. It is also possible to identify difficulties that may be blocking progress.

A. Clarity of Goals

1	2	3	4	5
No apparent goals	Confusion about goals	Some clarity of goals	Considerable clarity of goals	Remarkable clarity of goals

B. Trust and Openness

1	2	3	4	5
None	A little	Some	Considerable	Remarkable

C. Empathy Among Members

1	2	3	4	5
None	A little	Some	Considerable	Remarkable

D. Balance Between Completing Tasks and Meeting Needs of Members

1	2	3	4	5
None	A little	Some	Considerable	Remarkable

E. Decision Making

1	2	3	4	5
No decision making	Inadequate decision making	Average decision making	Good decision making	Full consensus

F. Use of Group Resources (knowledge, skills, experience)

1	2	3	4	5
None	Inadequate	Some	Considerable	Full and effective

G. Sense of Belonging

1	2	3	4	5
None	Inadequate	Some	Considerable	Strong

*Adapted from Margaret Arbuckle and Lynn Murray, *Building Systems for Professional Growth: An Action Guide,* (Andover, Mass.: The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement and Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services, 1989), p. 69.

Checklist 2. Measuring team effectiveness*

When the members of your school council function as an effective team, they can contribute greatly to the success of your school and of the people who work in it and the students and communities it serves. To maintain the effectiveness of your team, you must make frequent assessments and adjustments, and sometimes seek help in the area of training to strengthen those factors that contribute to team success. You can use this survey to gauge how well you are doing with each of those factors.

Factors That Contribute to Team Effectiveness	Action to Be Taken			
1. Shared goals and objectives are established.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
2. Resources are well used.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
3. All members contribute.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
4. Members have mutual trust and respect.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
5. Effective conflict-resolution processes are used.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
6. Leadership is shared.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
7. Strong interpersonal communication is present.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
8. Effective problem-solving approaches are used.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
9. Appropriate decision-making processes are considered.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help
10. The atmosphere encourages creativity.	☐ Celebrate success	☐ Plan some fine tuning	☐ Schedule a meeting to work on this	☐ Seek help

*Adapted from The National Staff Development Council, *The Innovator* (May 1995), p. 3. Available from The National Staff Development Council, P.O. Box 240, Oxford, Ohio 45056, U.S.A.

Checklist 3. Empowering your team by building trust*

You will require a high level of trust among your team members so that you can share information openly, discuss innovative solutions, and develop creative plans for helping students. Use the following survey to identify those areas where you need to increase your level of trust.

1. I contribute facts, opinions, and suggestions during group discussions.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
2. I express willingness to co-operate with others and expect their co-operation.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
3. My dealings with the entire group are open and candid.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
4. I support members when they struggle to express themselves.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
5. I offer help to anyone in the group in an effort to improve the group's performance.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
6. I listen receptively to others and avoid judging them as "right" or "wrong".	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
7. I avoid evaluating other members' contributions on the basis of whether these contributions are useful to me.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
8. I take risks in expressing my feelings and new ideas.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
9. I let other group members know I appreciate their talents, skills, and knowledge, as well as the resources they provide.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always
10. I share books and other resources to promote the success of all members.	☐ Seldom	☐ Frequently	☐ Always

*Adapted from The National Staff Development Council, *The Innovator* (September 1995), p. 3. Available from The National Staff Development Council, P.O. Box 240, Oxford, Ohio 45056, U.S.A.

Checklist 4. Building effective teams*

The members of an effective team are committed to group goals above and beyond their personal goals and understand how the team fits into the overall business of the school and the board. Team members trust each other to honour commitments, maintain confidences, and support team goals, and they feel a sense of partnership with each other despite differences and disagreements.

Everyone on an effective team has a role and participates in achieving consensus on action plans. Every effective team has a clear purpose, established communication methods, and agreed-on ways of dealing with problems, planning procedures, regular meetings, and agendas and minutes of meetings.

The following survey can help you and the other council members analyse your strengths and the areas that need improvement, plan special training sessions to address critical issues, and celebrate your team's progress in becoming more effective.

1. The team includes members with varied skills and interests.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
2. Members respect and trust each other.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
3. Members agree on the council's purpose.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
4. Members consider the council's purpose workable.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
5. The team has an action plan.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
6. The team has drawn up timelines for each project, describing the steps in the project.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
7. Team members understand what resources are available to help meet team needs and goals.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
8. The team meets regularly.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
9. The team meets at times convenient for all members.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate

(continued on next page)

*Adapted from The National Staff Development Council, *The Innovator* (October 1995), p. 3. Available from The National Staff Development Council, P.O. Box 240, Oxford, Ohio 45056, U.S.A.

10. Team meeting places are convenient and comfortable.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
11. Agendas are prepared and distributed before meetings.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
12. Written minutes are distributed soon after meetings.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
13. The team has assigned roles.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
14. Members understand which roles belong to one person and which roles are shared.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
15. Each team member takes an active role in discussions.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
16. Team members listen attentively.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
17. The team has procedures for resolving conflict and reaching consensus.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate
18. The team has established ways to communicate with the entire school community.	☐ We need help with this	☐ We're making progress	☐ We have reason to celebrate

Checklist 5. Developing a profile of an effective school council*

Regular assessment of the school council's practices by its members enhances the council's effectiveness and efficiency.

Using this profile, you and the other council members can identify the practices that are working well for your team and those that need improvement. Your team can use the information obtained from this profile to prepare a plan for improving those areas that need improvement and to celebrate your successes.

Education Direction of School			
1. The team develops a manageable action plan for each year, which focuses on student learning.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
2. The team focuses on activities that have a significant impact on student learning.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
3. The team has a shared vision and mission that focuses on student learning.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
4. The team oversees development and implementation of the school council action plan.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
5. The team ensures that the school council action plan is monitored and revised as needed.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always

Effectiveness of Meetings			
1. The team meets regularly.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
2. Team meetings are scheduled in advance, and members are notified of meeting times.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
3. Team members attend regularly.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
4. Minutes are kept of all meetings and made available to members and key constituencies.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
5. Team members work between meetings as needed.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always

Ability to Work as a Team			
1. Team members communicate effectively with each other.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
2. Team members use consensus for decision making.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
3. Team members resolve problems and conflicts effectively.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
4. Members work together as a well-functioning team.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
5. The team regularly assesses itself.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always

(continued on next page)

*Adapted from The National Staff Development Council, *The Innovator* (March 1996), pp. 4-5. Available from The National Staff Development Council, P.O. Box 240, Oxford, Ohio 45056, U.S.A.

Management of Team Diversity

1. The team uses members' skills and areas of expertise.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
2. All members participate fully in discussions and decisions.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
3. The team works to ensure that all members feel included and valued.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always

Communication

1. The team seeks input from teachers, parents, students, community members, and other constituents.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
2. The team informs the full school community of its activities and the outcomes of these activities.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
3. The team uses an external as well as an internal communication plan.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always

Team Leadership

1. The principal and chair work together to lead the team.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
2. The principal and team members work to clarify their respective roles and responsibilities.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
3. The chair ensures that all team members have the timely information they need to make decisions.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
4. The principal acts as a facilitative leader in team decision making.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always
5. Members share leadership and responsibility for the teams' work.	☐ Rarely	☐ Sometimes	☐ Always

The Role of School Councils

Council Membership

Getting Started

Establishing
and Maintaining
Effective Communication

Holding Effective Meetings

Assessing Your
Council's Progress

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1. Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 (PPM 122)

Appendix 2. Understanding PPM 122: Questions and Answers

Appendix 3. Information on Education in Ontario

Appendix 4. Suggested Orientation Activities

Appendix 5. Excerpts from a Sample Constitution and Sample Guidelines

Appendix 6. Rules of Order

Appendix 7. Sample Format for a Meeting Agenda

Appendix 8. Sample Planning Checklist for a Meeting

Appendix 9. Sample Minutes of a Meeting

Appendix 10. Strategies to Involve Council Members

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 (PPM 122)

Ontario

Ministry of Education and Training

Issued under the authority of the Deputy Minister of Education and Training

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122

Date of Issue: April 12, 1995

Effective: Until revoked or modified

Subject: SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES ON SCHOOL COUNCILS

Application: Chairpersons of School Boards and Minority-Language Sections
Directors of Education
Principals of Schools

BACKGROUND

The government recognizes that the education of Ontario's young people is a shared responsibility involving schools, students and their families, and members of the community. Parents and guardians have the right, as well as the responsibility, to participate in the education of their children, and can contribute to their children's development in a wide variety of ways. Other members of the community, including members of health, social service, and recreational agencies, also offer a wealth of experience and expertise that may be of benefit to students. Students themselves may have some excellent suggestions pertaining to their education. Members of all of these groups should, therefore, have the opportunity to advise in educational matters.

The Ministry of Education and Training is committed to encouraging partnerships that will enhance the education of the province's young people and foster increased sharing of information about the programs being offered by schools. In Ontario, many schools already have an association or committee that enables parents and other community members to provide input on topics pertaining to the school's educational program. Feedback from these committees and associations and from the schools has been positive and encouraging, and indicates that community participation has been very valuable.

The recent reports of the Royal Commission on Learning and the Ontario Parent Council have recommended that all schools be required to establish advisory committees to increase communication between schools and their communities and, in the words of the commission's report, to enable parents and students to assume "a more responsible and active role" in education programs and services within their local community. These reports support similar recommendations made over the years by provincial parent associations.

37-1240 (REV07/93)

DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES ON SCHOOL COUNCILS

The provincial policy on school councils will require school boards and minority-language sections to develop policies that direct schools in their jurisdictions to begin the establishment of school councils in September 1995, and to ensure that a school council is in place in all schools by June 1996. This memorandum outlines the minimum requirements for the composition and functioning of school councils that must be included in each school board's or section's policy.[1]

School board policies should enable school communities either to establish entirely new organizations as the school councils or to set up the school councils by adapting existing parent/community associations or committees so that they conform to the requirements set out in this memorandum. It is important to note, however, that school communities may have parent/community organizations in addition to the school councils. The school councils are not intended to replace such organizations, which continue to make valuable contributions within the education community.

School boards are encouraged to involve parents in the development of board policies on school councils.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COMPOSITION AND OPERATION OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

School boards must ensure that the following requirements are included in their policies on school councils.

1. Membership and Term of Office

Members of a school council shall include, but not be limited to:

- parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school;
- community representatives;
- a student (mandatory in secondary schools; in elementary schools, at the discretion of the principal);
- the school principal;
- a teacher;
- a non-teaching staff member.

Parents and guardians shall form the majority of the council, except in adult day schools, where parent positions shall be held by students. It is expected that the membership of the council will reflect the diversity of the school community.

1. Henceforth in this document, the term "school board" includes minority-language sections.

Membership in the school council shall be determined in the following ways:
- Parents shall be elected by parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school.
- The chair of the council shall be a member who is also a parent and shall be elected by the council.
- Community representatives shall be appointed by the council.
- The student representative shall be elected by students.
- The school principal shall be a designated member.
- The teacher representative shall be elected by members of the teaching staff.
- The non-teaching staff member shall be elected by members of the non-teaching staff.

The term of office for elected and appointed positions shall be one or two years, as determined by board policy. Elected and appointed members may seek additional terms of office.

There will be no honorarium paid to members of the school council.

2. Roles and Responsibilities of the School Councils

School councils are advisory bodies. A school council will provide advice to the school principal and, where appropriate, to the school board on any of the matters listed below that the council has identified as priorities:
- local school-year calendar
- school code of student behaviour
- curriculum and program goals and priorities
- the responses of the school or school board to achievement in provincial and board assessment programs
- preparation of the school profile
- selection of principals
- school budget priorities, including local capital-improvement plans
- school-community communication strategies
- methods of reporting to parents and the community
- extracurricular activities in the school
- school-based services and community partnerships related to social, health, recreational, and nutrition programs
- community use of school facilities
- local co-ordination of services for children and youth
- development, implementation, and review of board policies at the local level

The provincial policy will require that a school board's policy direct the school principal and, where relevant, senior staff and trustees of the board to seek advice from the school council as part of the process of making decisions with regard to the matters listed above.

In addition to its advisory responsibilities, the school council shall:
- establish its goals, priorities, and procedures;
- organize information and training sessions to enable members of the council to develop their skills as council members;
- hold a minimum of four meetings per year (all meetings shall be open to members of the school community);
- communicate regularly with parents and other members of the community to seek their views and preferences with regard to matters being addressed by the council, and to report on the activities of the council to the school community;
- promote the best interests of the school community.

3. Roles and Responsibilities of School Council Members

a) Chair

The chair of the school council shall:
- call school council meetings;
- prepare the agenda for school council meetings;
- chair school council meetings;
- ensure that the minutes of school council meetings are recorded and maintained;
- participate in information and training programs;
- communicate with the school principal;
- ensure that there is regular communication with the school community;
- consult with senior board staff and trustees, as required.

b) Council Members

The members of the school council shall:
- participate in council meetings;
- participate in information and training programs;
- act as a link between the school council and the community;
- encourage the participation of parents from all groups and of other people within the school community.

c) The Principal

The principal of the school shall:
- facilitate the establishment of the school council and assist in its operation;
- support and promote the council's activities;
- seek input from the council in areas for which it has been assigned advisory responsibility;
- act as a resource on laws, regulations, board policies, and collective agreements;
- obtain and provide information required by the council to enable it to make informed decisions;
- communicate with the chair of the council, as required;

- ensure that copies of the minutes of the council's meetings are kept at the school;
- assist the council in communicating with the school community;
- encourage the participation of parents from all groups and of other people within the school community.

4. The School Board and the School Councils

Some school boards already include parents and other members of the community in an advisory role at the board level. School boards are encouraged to continue, or to initiate, this practice. Boards are also encouraged to facilitate communication among the school councils within their jurisdiction.

School boards shall review and revise their policies on the selection of principals to ensure that the school councils participate in principal selection. Boards shall also involve representatives of their school councils in the revision of these policies.

5. Evaluation and Reporting

School boards shall develop procedures for evaluating the implementation of their policies on the establishment and operation of school councils.

A report on the establishment and operation of the school councils shall be included in the annual report of the director of education of each school board.

ASSISTANCE FROM THE MINISTRY

School Council Handbook

The ministry will collaborate with stakeholders to produce a school council handbook to assist school boards, schools, and school councils. The handbook will contain materials and information to help boards establish school councils and to assist the members of school councils in carrying out their responsibilities. It will be available in September 1995.

Professional Development

The ministry will work with school boards and other organizations and stakeholders to ensure that such programs as the Supervisory Officer's Qualification Program and the Principal's Qualification Program prepare school board members and principals for their work with school councils. The ministry will also collaborate with boards and other stakeholders to develop in-service programs and materials for school council members.

School Council Forum

The ministry and stakeholder groups will organize a School Council Forum in the spring of 1996. This forum is intended to provide opportunities for representatives of school councils and school boards throughout the province to discuss their experiences in setting up and maintaining their councils. It will also enable members of school councils across the province to establish a basis for networking. Further details about the forum will be provided later this year.

Understanding PPM 122: Questions and Answers

The following questions and answers should help explain how school councils will work and why they are being established. The questions and answers are grouped by topic: General information, Definitions, Policy development, Elections, Roles and responsibilities, and Implementation.

General information

How will the school council be accountable?

The school council will conform to the requirements of board policy and procedures and be accountable to the school community it represents.

Is Ontario the only place that requires school councils in all its schools?

No. School councils are being established in most other provinces and territories in Canada, and in many other locations around the world. Although there are some differences in the composition and roles of the councils from one locality to another, most share the principle of promoting more collaboration among the school, the home, and other community partners.

How will the council determine what issues are to be discussed at school and board levels?

PPM 122 outlines a variety of matters on which the school council may advise the principal and, where appropriate, the school board. Each school board should develop a process for determining the types of information it will seek, and a strategy for sharing such information with the board administrators and trustees. Trustees, principals, and school boards will continue to perform their duties and responsibilities as specified in the Education Act, regulations, board policies, and procedures.

Are school councils mandatory?

Yes. As outlined in PPM 122, school councils are to be in place in all schools by June 1996.

Definitions

What is meant by "advisory"?

When advising, the school council will provide ideas and opinions to assist the principal in making decisions. The advice should reflect the views of the school community and the best interests of the students.

What is meant by "the school community"?

Parents and guardians of children who are enrolled in the school, along with other people who live or work within the school's attendance area, make up the school community.

Policy development

How will conflict-of-interest issues applying to school council members be dealt with?

Each school board may define "conflict of interest" and develop a process to deal with such situations. Ontario civil servants should refer to Regulation 977 made under the Public Service Act regarding conflict-of-interest issues.

What liability will council members have for the advice they provide to schools and school boards? Will members require insurance?

The Ontario School Board Insurance Exchange (OSBIE) provides liability insurance for the majority of Ontario school boards. Those school boards should contact OSBIE with respect to their coverage. Boards that are insured with other insurers should check with their brokers about coverage for school councils. OSBIE advises that its liability insurance extends to volunteers who are working within the scope of their duties on behalf of the school board.

What authority will school boards have over local school councils?

Boards are to develop local policies and procedures within the requirements of PPM 122, which provide guidelines for school councils. Boards should consider including a mechanism for dispute resolution in their procedures.

Will school council meetings be open to the public?

Yes.

How will councils decide what kind of advice they should try to give?

Each council will determine priorities to reflect student needs, community views, and the school growth or improvement plan.

Will each school council have to have a constitution?

The board policy and procedures should provide direction. School councils will probably need some guidelines to give all members a common understanding of how the group will function.

Elections

Who can be elected as a parent representative?

Anyone who is a parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the school can be elected as a parent representative for its school council.

Can trustees seek election as parent representatives?

Trustees who are parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school can be elected by parents as parent representatives on the school council. Boards may wish to address this issue in their procedures.

Can parents who work for the school board be elected as parent representatives?

Any parent or guardian of students enrolled in the school may be elected by parents to serve on the council.

Do parents have to be Catholic to serve on a school council in a separate school?

Separate school boards may develop procedures that require members elected to the school council to hold the denominational qualifications necessary to be a trustee of the board. The ministry, however, encourages separate school boards to frame their policies in a way that will restrict as little as possible the participation of parents and guardians whose children are enrolled in the school.

Does a parent have to be a "French-speaking person" who has rights under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to serve on a school council in a French-language school?

Since the working language of the school council in a French-language school will be French, the ability to speak French will allow members of the council to participate fully in the work of the council.

Can parents be appointed as community representatives?

Yes, if the council decides to appoint them. However, the council may prefer to choose someone from a community group, or a business or service organization within the school community, that is not represented on the council.

What qualifications do people need to sit on school councils?

Qualifications for elected and appointed members are outlined in PPM 122. Any additional criteria may be determined by the board in consultation with all partners.

What will happen if not enough parents want to be involved in the council?

The school council will maintain vacant positions as it begins its work, and continue to seek involvement of parents through outreach strategies.

How will the council gain membership from non-teaching staff, especially in small schools?

Every effort should be made to encourage non-teaching staff to become members of the school council. Where no non-teaching staff person is available or agrees to participate, the school council will operate without representation from the non-teaching staff.

In developing their policies and guidelines, boards may want to consider that non-teaching staff who are school council members may have to attend meetings during working hours. Serving on the council is voluntary and there is no honorarium.

Roles and responsibilities

Can trustees attend the school council meetings?

Yes, they are open meetings.

How will school councils relate to the school board?

Boards should develop procedures for seeking input from school councils and for communicating with them.

What will happen if the school council or a member of the council comments upon personnel matters and matters that are dealt with under collective agreements?

Personnel matters are the responsibility of a school board's administration, which operates in accordance with board policy. Employment issues will continue to be dealt with by the board and principal according to processes for employee matters. Both the council and individual members of the council can incur personal liability if they exceed their mandate.

What will happen if a council insists upon a course of action that contravenes board policy?

Members of a council may be personally liable if they go beyond the advisory role or do not follow the ministry or board policies. Each board should provide councils with a clear statement regarding liability insurance and coverage.

What does PPM 122 mean when it states that school councils will participate in the selection of principals?

School councils will have opportunities to provide input to the criteria for the selection of principals, and to identify the specific needs of their schools when principals are being transferred. Boards may choose to exceed these requirements.

School councils will not be involved, however, in issues relating to performance of individual staff members, as these issues are covered in collective agreements, board policies, and legislation.

Will school councils be involved in the hiring of other staff?

School councils are advisory bodies and will not be involved in staff hiring. They are not authorized to deal with employment issues.

What will the role of principals be?

Principals are to be designated members of the school council. They will facilitate the establishment of the school council, attend council meetings, and support the activities of the council. They will assist in the distribution of information from the council to the community, obtain information about education legislation and board policies and provide it to members of the school council, and seek the advice of the council in those areas in which the council has responsibility for providing advice. Principals will also play a key role in identifying, developing, and sustaining alliances with key community groups and organizations.

Will principals be accountable for acting on the advice of the school councils?

Principals will take the advice of the councils into consideration during the process of decision making. Boards may include in their procedures guidelines for the appropriate incorporation of advice into the decision-making process.

Implementation

What dispute-resolution mechanisms will be in place?

Each school board may provide a process to resolve conflicts that may develop.

Will there be training for members of the school councils?

Training modules will be designed for members of the school councils to assist them in their new roles. The training may be provided by board staff members or parents.

In addition, training sessions will be made available to boards to assist principals in developing the collaborative leadership skills necessary to support effective school councils.

Will each council have a budget?

No new funding will be provided for school councils. It is anticipated that they will be self-funding, as are current parent groups.

Given the ethnic diversity that is being encouraged, will the use of interpreters be necessary? If so, who will pay for them?

Individual boards may decide that interpreters are necessary to encourage community involvement. Boards would then be responsible for associated costs.

Will parents who are not members of the school council have opportunities to provide input to the council?

Yes. Each school council, in accordance with the board's policy, will have in place processes for providing input.

Information on Education in Ontario

Education in Ontario*

Parents seeking information about educational issues sometimes have difficulty determining exactly who is responsible for specific aspects of their children's education. The following breakdown should provide a clear idea of the responsibilities of each of the participants in the system, from the Minister of Education and Training to the student in the classroom.

The legal framework

In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility. Each province has enacted a statute or statutes outlining the duties to be exercised by the chief official responsible for education. In Ontario, that chief official is the Minister of Education and Training. Because the Minister obviously cannot do all the things required to educate every child, it is necessary in the statute to set out the responsibilities that are delegated by the province to other bodies and officials. In Ontario this statute is the Education Act. Under this act there are also a number of regulations that define in more detail the general provisions laid down in the statute.

The Minister of Education and Training

The Minister of Education and Training determines the general direction for education and policy in the schools of the province. The Minister is assisted in this task by advice from citizens and associations interested in education and by the professional educators on the staff of the Ministry of Education and Training. The Minister, then, is responsible for:

- providing curriculum guidelines to school boards for the development of courses of study for Ontario schools;
- approving the list of learning materials from which school boards may select learning materials for schools;
- establishing the requirements for student diplomas and certificates;
- making regulations to govern:
  - the school year and holidays of students;
  - the organization of schools;
  - the duties of teachers and of school board officials;
- establishing the requirements for and issuing teaching certificates;**

*Most of the information presented here was originally published in a ministry fact sheet entitled "Who's Responsible for Your Child's Education?", which is out of date and out of print. This information has been revised and updated.

**In the near future, responsibility for establishing the requirements for and issuing teaching certificates will be taken over by the newly formed Ontario College of Teachers. Up-to-date information on the Ontario College of Teachers and on education in Ontario will be available on the Ministry of Education and Training's World Wide Web site at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca.

- distributing funds allocated by the Legislature for the purpose of assisting school boards with the costs of operating schools.

The local school board

While the Minister of Education and Training establishes the general policy for schools, it is the locally elected school boards that operate the schools. A school board is therefore responsible for:

- ensuring that the schools within its jurisdiction abide by the provisions of the Education Act and its regulations;
- drawing up an annual budget and requisitioning local taxes to cover expenditures in excess of the amount provided by the provincial grants;
- determining the number, size, and location of schools within its jurisdiction, and the attendance area for each school;
- building, equipping, and furnishing schools;
- employing teachers and other staff to operate the schools;
- providing programs that are responsive to the needs of the community and to the needs of the students in the schools;
- providing special education programs;
- approving the choice of learning materials from the ministry list and approving all other learning materials used in the schools;
- enforcing the school attendance provisions of the Education Act.

School boards may also provide school supplies and learning materials for students, operate summer and evening classes, and provide transportation for students to and from school. They employ the staff required to manage and supervise the operation of school programs and their supporting services. The directors of education and other supervisory officers employed by the school boards must hold a Supervisory Officer's Certificate issued by the ministry.

Supervisory officers, in addition to the duties assigned by a school board, are responsible for:

- helping teachers improve their teaching practices;
- reporting to the board on the effectiveness of teachers;
- supervising the operation and organization of schools and their educational programs;
- supervising the administration and maintenance of buildings in the school system.

The principal of the school

The principal is responsible for the organization and management of the school, as well as for discipline and the quality of instruction. He or she is the principal teacher in the school. In addition to his or her teaching duties, the principal is responsible for:

- overseeing the organization of the school and the admission and placement of students;
- assigning teachers to classes and supervising students;
- supervising and assisting the teachers in the school;
- selecting, in co-operation with the teachers, learning materials from among those approved by the Minister and the school board;

- establishing and maintaining student records;
- reporting to parents on student progress and achievement;
- maintaining school discipline;
- making recommendations to the school board, through the appropriate supervisory officer, regarding the appointment, promotion, demotion, or dismissal of teachers;
- ensuring that the school facilities are properly maintained.

In situations where a board feels that a school principal needs help with his or her duties, usually because of the size of the school, it may appoint one or more vice-principals to assist the principal in carrying out his or her duties.

The department/unit head

In large schools with specialized courses, such as secondary schools, boards usually set up sections or departments because there are too many teachers and diverse courses for a principal and vice-principal or vice-principals to supervise effectively without assistance. The teachers in charge of these units are responsible for:

- developing courses of study from the Minister's curriculum guidelines for the classes in the unit;
- assisting the principal in the supervision of his or her unit and in the operation of that unit;
- helping teachers in the unit improve their teaching methods;
- co-ordinating all activities of the unit.

The teacher

Under the Education Act and its regulations, teachers are responsible for:

- teaching "diligently and faithfully" the classes or subjects assigned to them by the principal;
- encouraging students in the pursuit of learning;
- establishing "by precept and example respect for religion" and support for the values of a democratic society founded on moral principles;
- maintaining classroom discipline;
- evaluating student learning and progress;
- preparing teaching plans and courses of study for classes;
- supervising the students placed in their charge.

The parent

Section 21(5) of the Education Act contains the following clause:

> The parent or guardian of a child who is required to attend school under this section shall cause the child to attend school as required by this section.

Parents, who are also taxpayers, have both a right and a responsibility to share in planning their children's education and determining how their children's individual needs are to be met. Parents may actively participate in the education process by becoming members of a parent-teacher group in their community or the school council at their children's school.

At the secondary school level, the parental role remains equally important. Through involvement in the students' course selections and active participation in parent-teacher activities, parents can make a significant contribution as their children undergo the often difficult transition to young adulthood.

The student

Under the regulations, a student is responsible for:

- attending classes punctually and regularly;
- exercising self-discipline;
- accepting "such discipline as would be exercised by a kind, firm and judicious parent";
- observing the following rules and standards of conduct: being "clean in person and habits", "diligent in ... studies", "courteous to fellow pupils and obedient and courteous to teachers";
- taking "such tests or examinations as are required".

Conclusion

The duties outlined above for each participant in the education system are set out in the Education Act and the regulations governing schools. They form an interrelated chain of responsibilities resulting in the provision of high-quality education for the young people of Ontario. These duties have been set out in law so that children and adolescents will have the opportunity to attend school, to learn, and to achieve the objectives that have been established by the Ministry of Education and Training to serve the interests of our society.

The school board at a glance

Each school board may prepare a fact sheet that gives an overview of the board. School council members may obtain specific information about their board from the fact sheet. The fact sheet may contain the following information:

- the board's mandate
- facts related to the board's decision making process, including:
  - the roles and responsibilities of trustees, senior staff members, principals, and teachers
  - the development of policy and procedures
- an outline of the curriculum used in the board's schools
- a list of special services offered by the board
- a summary of the board's finances
- a description of the board's departments and their functions
- an indication of the geographic area of the board
- statistics related to:
  - board staff
  - schools
  - teaching staff
  - support staff
  - students
- a description of the board's accountability and reporting methods
- the calendar for meetings of committees and the board
- the organization chart
- a list of reference materials such as:
  - the board's policies and procedures
  - the annual report
  - other board publications

The school at a glance

Each school may prepare a fact sheet and a school profile. The fact sheet would provide a "snapshot" of the school, while the school profile would provide much more comprehensive information (see "Developing a school profile", page 19). From the fact sheet, school council members may obtain basic information about their school, such as the following:

- the school's mission and goals
- school culture/community
- the number of students and staff members
- an indication of the area served
- the organization chart
- a school calendar and list of holidays
- school highlights
- a description of students' timetables
- a description of any special programs
- a list of partnerships with community groups

Suggested Orientation Activities

The following is a menu of topics and activities that can be used as part of an orientation program. Each council can select and adapt those that are most appropriate.

Topic	Purpose	Activity/Strategy	Handbook Page Reference(s)	Time Required
Getting to know one another	• to help build relationships by learning more about each other	• People Search*	p. 89	15 minutes
		• Four-Corner Name Tag**	p. 90	30 minutes
		• Treasure Hunt**	p. 91	15 minutes
	• to review ways to work as a team	• personal reading*	pp. 27 to 29	15 minutes
Understanding our purpose	• to understand the role of the council and its members	• Jigsaw of PPM 122 and/or of board policies and procedures*	p. 76	1 hour
Creating a vision	• to share views on the characteristics of an effective council	• Think, Pair, Share*	p. 73	20 minutes
	• to develop a shared vision	• group discussion**		1 to 2 hours
		• Mind Map and/or Snowball**	pp. 77 and 85	30 minutes
Planning for working together	• to identify the characteristics of effective teams	• personal reading and group discussion*	p. 27	20 minutes
		• Mind Map or Graffiti Board*	p. 77 or 75	30 minutes

(continued on next page)

* These activities should be used when the council is first formed, at the first two formal meetings or earlier.

** These activities can be used throughout the council's first year of operation.

Topic	Purpose	Activity/Strategy	Handbook Page Reference(s)	Time Required
Planning for working together (continued)	• to identify the characteristics of effective meetings	• Four Corners*	p. 84	30 minutes
	• to develop norms for working together	• Nominal Group Process or Snowball*	p. 87 or 85	1 hour
	• to create a code of ethics	• group discussion based on the activities above**		1 hour
	• to understand the stages of team development	• personal reading and group discussion**	pp. 27-29	30 minutes
	• to identify ways to support the council during each stage of team development	• personal reading and group discussion**	pp. 27-29	20 minutes
		• Carousel Brainstorming**	p.79	40 minutes
	• to review ways to make decisions	• personal reading and group discussion**	pp. 33-34	1 to 2 hours
		• SWOT or T-Chart*	p. 81 or 74	30 minutes
	• to review listening and presenting skills	• personal reading**	pp. 30-32	20 minutes
	• to share strategies for dealing with conflicts	• group discussion**	pp. 35-36	30 minutes

* These activities should be used when the council is first formed, at the first two formal meetings or earlier.

** These activities can be used throughout the council's first year of operation.

Excerpts from a Sample Constitution and Sample Guidelines

Excerpts from the constitution of St. Christopher School Parent Teacher Committee, Dufferin-Peel Roman Catholic Separate School Board

Article I – Name

The organization shall be known as "St. Christopher School Parent Teacher Committee" (P.T.C.) and will be recognized by our logo on all correspondence.

Article II – Non-profit Organization

The Committee will operate without financial gain for its members. Any profit to the organization will be used in promoting its purposes.

The P.T.C. shall operate any fund raising activities in strict accordance with board policy under the guidance of the school administrator.

Article III – Purposes

The objectives of this group will be to improve the school's learning environment by:

a) enhancing the lines of communication among parents and/or guardians, administrators, teachers and children in the school community;

b) providing a forum for input into educational matters for members of the school community;

c) providing a vehicle for transmitting parental ideas, recommendations and concerns to school board committees or to the board itself;

d) sponsoring additional programs that would otherwise not be provided;

e) assisting in the building of a visible Catholic community working together in the interest of Catholic education.

Article VIII – Sub-committees

a) A sub-committee shall be formed whenever the need arises (e.g. fun lunches, fund raising).

b) Each sub-committee shall consist of a Co-ordinator and any P.T.C. members who wish to participate.

c) Progress reports to be made at all general meetings.
d) The Co-ordinator shall:
   1) consult with the executive Co-Chairperson/Meetings whenever necessary;
   2) delegate various responsibilities to other committee members;
   3) keep a detailed record of pertinent information and budgetary matters;
   4) present a final report containing recommendations and a financial statement at the next general meeting;
   5) submit all records to the Co-Chairperson/Secretary at the conclusion of the event.

Article XI - Quorum

A quorum for a general meeting shall consist of:

a) one (1) school administrator or delegate; and

b) four (4) other members of the P.T.C.

Article XII - Amendments

Any proposed change or addition to the constitution must be submitted in writing to the Co-Chairperson/Meeting of the P.T.C. at least two weeks prior to a general meeting and placed on the agenda. The change must be presented in motion form and passed by a $^{2}/_{3}$ majority at a general meeting with a minimum of five members in attendance.

constitution adopted in January 1995

Excerpts from the guidelines for the School Advisory Council of Sir John A. Macdonald Public School, Lakehead Board of Education

Mission Statement

The Sir John A. Macdonald School Advisory Council will identify problems and concerns within the school environment and work collaboratively to develop strategies and solutions to enhance the development and educational experiences of all students and all people involved at Sir John A. Macdonald.

Goals

1. To promote and maintain a positive school environment for all students and staff at Sir John A. Macdonald.
2. To identify current problems and concerns within the school and discuss appropriate action for change and/or improvement.
3. To develop strategies and solutions regarding the above which will involve a collaborative effort by teaching staff, parents, students and administration.
4. To promote and encourage communication between home and school, thus empowering parents with a shared responsibility for their child(ren)'s educational experiences.
5. To keep up to date on current trends in education and to share this knowledge with the school community on a regular basis.
6. To provide staff, parents, and students with an accountable system to which they can voice their concerns, comments, and suggestions for future consideration.

Guidelines

The School Advisory Council, established in 1992, is comprised of 8 parents, 7 teachers, our principal and a community representative. One of these parents is a member of the Parents' Association executive. Positions for membership are open to any interested participants. The council meets once a month from 7:00-8:20 a.m. at the Landmark Inn. Subcommittees of parent and teacher members meet frequently to discuss issues and obtain information as warranted by the criteria of the Advisory Council. The report(s) of the subcommittees are presented to the Council for discussion and follow-up at general meetings.

Issues are dealt with in an orderly, democratic fashion and decisions are generally made by consensus. All members have equal opportunity to express their views and opinions in an appropriate manner. Timelines are established in an agenda format. Items for discussion must be submitted 7 days prior to the general meeting of the Council.

At present, a shared chairmanship is nominated by the committee members with one parent and one teacher being selected. The co-chairs meet to set the monthly agenda and to consult with the principal. This year we have our school secretary attend our monthly meetings to take minutes and distribute the minutes to all Council members. The minutes are posted in the staff room. The day after our monthly meetings the whole staff meets to be informed about what occurred at the meeting. Parents are informed in our monthly newsletter.

Students are encouraged to play a more active role in dealing with issues within the school. Student input is obtained through regular communication links with teaching staff and administration. Student Council representatives attend one meeting a term to give a report and express their concerns on school-related issues.

Staff and students are informed of any changes/improvements within the school environment as soon as they occur. This collaborative effort thus ensures the success of the Advisory Council's recommendations.

Parent forums are held several times throughout the year. Parents are given the opportunity to become informed on the activities of the Council. Parent input is also encouraged and discussion periods are provided at the end of these meetings. Parents and teachers are welcome to contact the Council chairpersons if they have any concerns or questions. An effort is made to consult with our bus drivers, school secretaries and our custodial staff to listen to their concerns.

The strategies of the Council are established at the last general meeting of the school year. These objectives may change according to current trends in curriculum, Board policies and Ministry of Education proposals. However, the ultimate focus of the Council is to improve and maintain a positive school environment for everyone at Sir John A. Macdonald.

council established in 1992

Rules of Order*

General rules

- An individual must be recognized by the chair before obtaining the floor to make a motion. This means that the chair must tell a person that it is his or her turn before that person can speak to the council and formally propose a course of action.
- Once an individual has the floor, he or she may make a formal proposal, or motion, beginning with the statement "I move that . . .".
- Before the motion can be considered, another individual must second the motion by saying "I second the motion." This does not necessarily indicate that he or she agrees with the proposal, only that it should be discussed.
- Once a motion has been made and seconded, the chair restates the motion (states the question) so that everyone clearly understands what is being proposed. From this point until the motion is voted on, all discussion must focus on the question.
- If members of the group wish to discuss the motion, the chair opens debate. Each participant may speak to the question twice, but no one may speak a second time until everyone has had the chance to speak once.
- If no one indicates a desire to speak further to the issue, the chair asks the council if it is ready for the question (ready to vote on the proposal). The chair then puts the question and conducts the vote by asking for those in favour and those opposed. (The vote may be conducted by a show of hands, by standing, or by secret ballot.)
- The majority needed to pass the motion (e.g., 51 per cent) should be stated in the school council by-laws. In case of a tie, the motion is defeated.

Rules about motions

Amending a motion

- Until the chair states the question, the person making the motion may change it, although the seconder may withdraw and the changed motion may need another seconder. Once the question has been stated, however, the motion can only be amended formally in one of the following ways:
  - The person making the motion may propose to change it. The chair will ask if anyone objects. If someone does object, the question to change the motion is put to a vote. If the group consents to the change, debate continues on the motion as amended.
  - Someone else may move to amend the motion by saying, "I move to amend the motion by . . .". Then the normal process for a motion, as outlined above in the "General rules" section, is followed.
- An amendment to the amendment may also be proposed, but a third amendment is out of order.
- After the amendment has been dealt with, discussion returns to the original motion.

*Adapted from Alberta Education, *School Councils Handbook* (Edmonton, Alta.: Alberta Education, 1996), pp. E6-E7.

Withdrawing a motion

- At any time before a vote, the person making the original motion may ask to withdraw it. The motion to withdraw does not require a seconder. Once the question is withdrawn, it is as if it never existed.
- If the chair has already stated the question and a request to withdraw the motion is made, the chair asks if there is any objection. If there is none, the motion is withdrawn. If someone objects, the request to withdraw the motion is put to a vote.

Tabling a motion

- A motion to table a motion means to set it aside to discuss at another time so that more pressing business can be discussed or more information about the issues can be obtained. The following rules apply to tabling a motion:
  - The motion to table takes precedence over the motion being discussed.
  - The motion to table requires a seconder.
  - There can be no debate on a motion to table.

Motions that are null and void

- Any motion that contradicts provincial laws and regulations, local policy, or school council by-laws is out of order, even if it was voted on and passed by a majority vote.

Sample Format for a Meeting Agenda

[name of school] School Council Meeting

[Date]

[Time]

[Location]

AGENDA

Time	Person Responsible	Item	Action
7:30	Chair	1. Welcome! • review of the agenda • introduction of guests • quick updates	
		2. Review and adoption of previous minutes	Decision
7:40	Parent or community representative	3. Presentation: Understanding Our Community • presentation by representatives of local ethnocultural networks • discussion of implications for students and school	Discussion
8:15	Teacher	4. Technology report (to be held in the computer lab) • update on hardware and the skill level of students • discussion on involving parents and community to a greater extent	Decision and action
8:45	Chair	5. New business	
		6. Date of next meeting	Information
9:00		Adjournment	

Sample Planning Checklist for a Meeting

PLANNING CHECKLIST

Meeting:

Date: _____

Starting time: _____

Ending time: _____

Participants:

Number:

- ☐ List of participants attached
- ☐ Name tags and holders
- ☐ Name cards

Facilities:

- ☐ Accessible to persons with disabilities
- ☐ Appropriate size of room
- ☐ Adequate lighting

Type of seating:

- ☐ circle
- ☐ u-shaped
- ☐ round table
- ☐ chevron
- ☐ classroom
- ☐ other _____

- ☐ Extra chair for committee reporter or guest
- ☐ Tables for participants to write on
- ☐ Pleasant atmosphere, conducive to discussion

Refreshments:

- ☐ Tea, coffee, juice

Equipment:

- ☐ projector
- ☐ extra bulbs
- ☐ extension cords
- ☐ flip chart(s)
- ☐ pens
- ☐ transparencies
- ☐ VCR
- ☐ microphone
- ☐ markers
- ☐ paper
- ☐ extra copies of agenda and previous minutes

Adapted from Alberta Education, *School Councils Handbook* (Edmonton, Alta.: Alberta Education, 1996), p. E12.

Sample Minutes of a Meeting

[name of school] School Council Meeting

[Date]

[Time]

[Location]

MINUTES

Members Present:

Regrets:

Agenda Item	Key Notes from Discussion	Action	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline
1.Sharing items	1. A curriculum night focusing on family math is being planned for January 18, 1997.	Inform parents	Principal	Dec. 5, 1996
	2. Interagency meeting was attended by_____. Display of services is to be organized for local mall - date to be determined. Another meeting was scheduled.	School council to be represented at meeting	Chair	Jan. 10, 1997
2.Minutes from previous meeting		Adopted as written	_____ (M) _____ (S)	
3.Presentation: Understanding Our Community	1. _____ and _____ presented an overview of community involvement and purpose. 2. Discussion focused on ways to encourage greater student involvement in community networks and to foster a working relationship between schools and networks.	Collect Carousel Brainstorming charts for further discussion	_____ _____	Distribute Carousel Brainstorming charts with agenda at meeting on January 12, 1997

Strategies to Involve Council Members

Introduction

One of the challenges faced by the chair or the person leading the discussion of a meeting is to engage all council members equally. This appendix contains a variety of strategies that can be used to involve all school council members in discussion, problem solving, and decision making. These strategies promote participation, help build a collaborative team, and support the ongoing learning of all council members.

The purpose of each strategy is stated at the beginning, followed by directions for the strategy. Also, for each strategy, an example of how it can be used is provided. The example shows the instructions that the chair or person leading the strategy would give to council members.

Something to think about

We learn about:

- **10 per cent of what we read;**
- **20 per cent of what we hear;**
- **30 per cent of what we see;**
- **50 per cent of what we both see and hear;**
- **70 per cent of what we discuss with others;**
- **80 per cent of what we experience personally;**
- **95 per cent of what we teach to someone else.**

William Glasser

Suggested Strategies

Think, Pair, Share

This strategy can be used whenever council members need to think about or deal with an issue or concern. It promotes both individual reflection and group sharing.

Directions

- The chair poses a question, concern, issue, or challenge, and asks members to think about it for about three to five minutes, recording their thoughts.
- Members then share their ideas with partners for about five minutes.
- All the members as a group share and discuss their ideas.

Example: Teaching and Learning Today

- Think of a time when you learned a difficult new skill.
- Record how you learned the new skill and how you felt as you were learning.
- Share with a partner. What are the similarities and differences in your and your partner's responses?
- Discuss with the whole group.

The discussion could lead to an exploration of current research on effective learning strategies in today's classroom.

T-Chart

A T-chart is a good strategy to brainstorm for ideas on the possible outcomes of a particular project or task. The ideas that participants come up with will often indicate the potential success of the project. Through brainstorming the participants may also be able to decide how to achieve the desired outcomes.

Directions

- The chair describes a situation or scene and asks council members, working in groups of three to five, to brainstorm for the kinds of things they would expect to hear and see in such a situation.
- The groups record their ideas on large sheets of chart paper. A large "T" should be drawn on each sheet; the phrase "Looks Like" should be written on the top left of each sheet and the phrase "Sounds Like" on the top right. Members then record their ideas in the appropriate columns.
- When they have finished noting their ideas, the groups share their charts and their thoughts with all the members.

Looks Like	Sounds Like
→ Students are using computers in the classroom.	→ "I'm going to see if I can find that information on the Internet."
→ The computer lab is fully booked.	→ "Let's listen to the story on the CD-ROM."
→ Teachers' unit plans include the use of technology.	→ "How do I make a graph using word processing?"
→ Students know and use keyboarding skills.	

Example: Effective Use of Technology

- What does your group think they would see and hear in a school in which computer technology is used effectively? Write your responses on the chart paper.
- Post your chart and share your comments with the other groups.

The follow-up discussion could integrate members' comments with current research on the use of technology in the schools and information about the school's technology plan.

Graffiti Board

This strategy helps members generate ideas on a topic. It promotes good discussion of the topic and may lead to consensus building.

Directions

- The chair poses a topic or question and asks council members to divide into small groups of three to five members.
- Each group writes the question or topic on a sheet of chart paper, which will be the group's "graffiti board".
- The members of each group individually record their responses to the question or topic on the group's sheet of paper. (The responses can be written randomly all over the page.)
- The sheets of "graffiti" are then posted and members share their responses with the whole council.

Example: Team Building

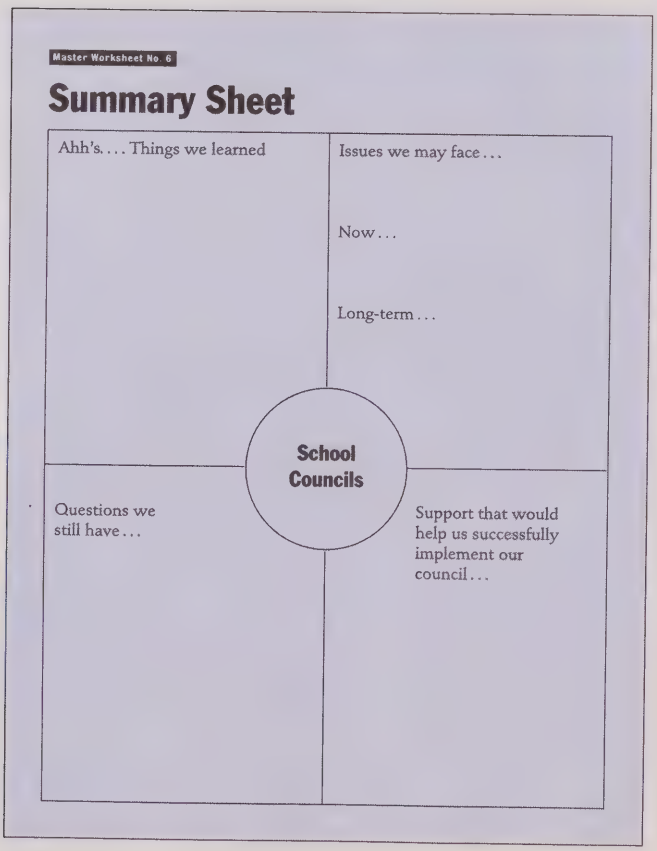
- Think of a time when you were part of a high-performing team.
- Individually, record what you consider to be the characteristics of a high-performing team. Each person in your group should have three to five minutes to do this. When everyone has finished, as a group, read all the characteristics on your chart and choose the three most important ones. Be prepared to explain the reasons for your choices to the whole council.
- Post your chart. Then share your ideas with all the members.
- Record the three characteristics that each group thought were most important, looking for similarities and differences.
- Follow up with a discussion of how your council could best function as a high-performing team.

Jigsaw

Jigsaw may be used when council members are required to study an article, a policy, or other printed material. It lessens the time required to study a document and leads to greater comprehension. It also promotes teamwork. In this strategy, each council member is given a different section of the article or other document to be studied, and is then responsible for telling other council members about that section.

Directions

- The chair provides each council member with a copy of an article (or other document) to be studied and asks members to form small groups of three to seven members. In each group, the article is divided into equal parts and each group member is assigned one section. (Depending on the length of the article, each section may be assigned to more than one group member.)


Master Worksheet No. 6

Summary Sheet

Ahh's. . . . Things we learned

Issues we may face . . .

Now . . .

Long-term . . .

School Councils

Questions we still have . . .

Support that would help us successfully implement our council . . .

- Each group member reads the section of the article assigned, highlighting its key points. Council members should understand that, although each person is dealing with only a small part of the article, all the parts will be shared with the group.
- When members have finished reading, they share their sections of the article with their group, summarizing the information they learned and answering any questions (perhaps on a worksheet that is similar to the one in the following example).

Example: Becoming Familiar with PPM 122

- After dividing into groups of about four members each, number off in your group from one to four, repeating the numbers if your group has more than four members. You and the members of your group will be responsible for different sections of the memorandum, as shown below. (The following information may be presented on chart paper or on an overhead.)
  - *Ones:* background
  - *Twos:* from the development of school board policies to the end of membership (at the top of page 3)
  - *Threes:* from the roles and responsibilities of school councils to the end of the roles and responsibilities of school council members
  - *Fours:* the rest of the document
- Read your section.
- Share your section with your group. As a group, complete the worksheet provided in the ministry's publication *Getting Started** or a similar worksheet.

*Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, *Getting Started: A Resource Guide for Establishing School Councils,* Working Document (Toronto, Ont.: Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 1996), Master Worksheet No. 6, p. 56.

Mind Map

"Mind mapping" is a strategy that encourages group members to record ideas and connections among ideas in a visual form. It helps participants understand the relationships among different concepts and ideas.

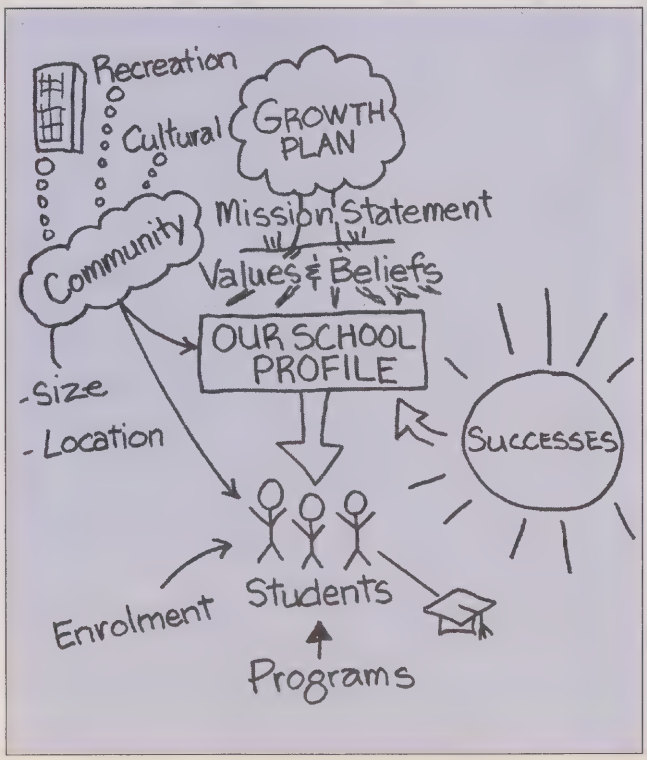
Directions

- The chair introduces the topic and then asks members to break into groups.
- Each group is provided with markers and chart paper and is asked to produce a mind map, as follows:
  - The *central topic or concept* is noted in the centre of the page.
  - *Important information* is highlighted by bubbles, arrows, or wavy lines.
  - *Colour* can be used to help members retain the ideas. It can also help organize different concepts.
  - *Key words* function as triggers that lead to additional, connected ideas.
  - *Chains* provide the connections or links to establish and create relationships between ideas.
  - *Visuals*, such as illustrations, novel shapes, and pictorial details, facilitate retention.
- The groups then share and discuss their mind maps with all the members.

Examples

The following are some examples of topics that might be suitable for mind mapping:

- Characteristics of the Ideal School
- Characteristics of Effective Teams
- Our School Profile (see the accompanying sample mind map)



Clustering

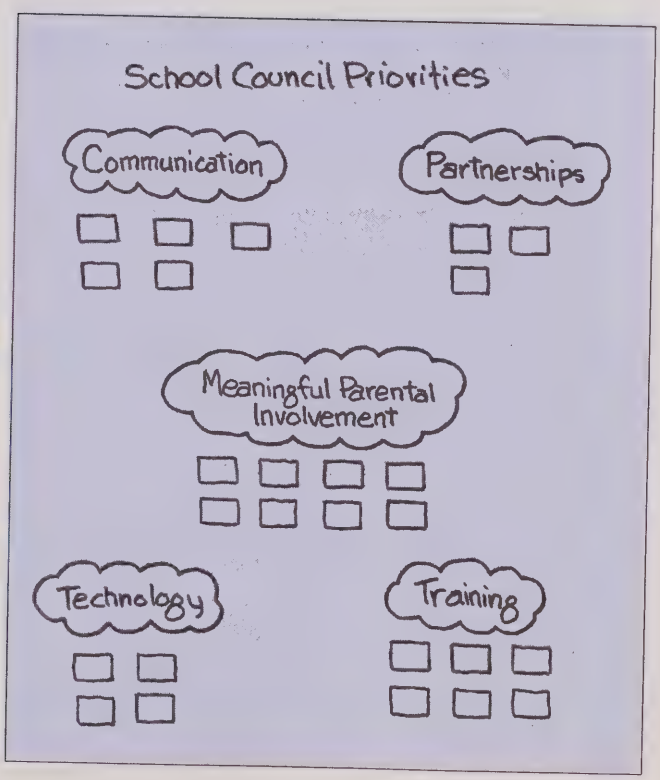
This strategy can help a group sort, discuss, and group their ideas. It promotes shared decision making.

Directions

- The chair presents a topic for discussion or brainstorming and asks members to form small groups. Each group is provided with chart paper and five self-stick notes for each person in the group.
- Each person has five to seven minutes to record five ideas related to the topic – one on each self-stick note.
- All the self-stick notes are placed on the chart paper and sorted so that notes with similar ideas are grouped together. Each cluster of notes is then given a title.
- The groups share their sheets and discuss the topic with all the members.

Example: Setting School Council Priorities

- List the five priorities you have for our council, one on each self-stick note.
- Place your notes on your group's chart paper.
- With the group members, sort similar ideas into clusters (groups) and give each cluster a title.
- Present the ideas shown on your chart to the other members of the council. Look for similarities among the ideas presented by all the groups.
- Discuss the priorities with all the members so that your council can reach consensus on three to five priorities for the council.



Carousel Brainstorming

In this strategy, council members are given the opportunity to provide input on several components of a topic or issue. Carousel brainstorming encourages creative thinking and is a good strategy to use when people need some physical activity.

Directions

- The chair posts sheets of chart paper around the room. On each sheet is a different question related to a central topic.
- Members form groups of approximately the same number of members each, one group for each sheet of chart paper.
- The members of each group stand in front of one of the sheets, choose a recorder, and brainstorm for responses to the posted question as quickly as possible.
- When two minutes have elapsed, each group moves to the sheet to the right, and the process is repeated. (The groups are not to repeat ideas already recorded, but are only to add new or different ones.) The activity continues at two-minute intervals until all the groups have responded to all the questions.

Example: Developing a School Profile

- Your council has been asked to develop a school profile. Use carousel brainstorming to find out what you and the other council members already know about the school.
- Record all you know on sheets of chart paper under the following headings:
  - The Student Population
  - Special Programs
  - The Structure of the School
  - The School's Strengths
  - Parental Involvement
  - Extracurricular Activities

As a follow-up activity, the sheets of chart paper could be posted in the school's staff room and staff members could be asked to add any missing information they consider important.

Gallery Walk

Whenever members have been involved in a group activity in which the ideas developed by each group have been recorded on sheets of chart paper and posted, a "gallery walk" through the posted ideas will help members become familiar with the ideas of the other groups. It will also help members choose the ideas or areas on which to focus.

Directions

- Each member is given four to six small self-stick dots and then asked to circulate and read all the sheets posted.
- After members read all the sheets, they place dots beside each of the ideas that they support strongly, making sure to use all their dots.
- The ideas that receive the strongest support, as indicated by the number of dots placed by them, should then be recorded and referred to when making decisions or plans.

Example: Developing a School Profile

After using the carousel brainstorming strategy to begin the process of developing a school profile (see page 79), use a gallery walk to help you determine the most important items to include in the school profile.

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats)

This strategy is a good way to begin a planning process since it helps members analyse a situation. More information is then usually required to complete the task.

This strategy may also be used to review the ways in which a council can make decisions.

Directions

- The chair outlines a topic for discussion, such as a plan or policy, and asks members to break into small groups.
- Each group discusses the plan (or policy) and fills in a chart containing the following headings:
  - What are the strengths of this plan?
  - What are the weaknesses of this plan?
  - What opportunities exist?
  - What threats should we consider?
- Each group then shares its chart and ideas with the other groups, and all the members decide how the information might be used.

Example

Use this activity when providing input to a school or board plan or policy.

What are the strengths of this plan?	What are the weaknesses of this plan?
What opportunities exist?	What threats should we consider?

Round Robin

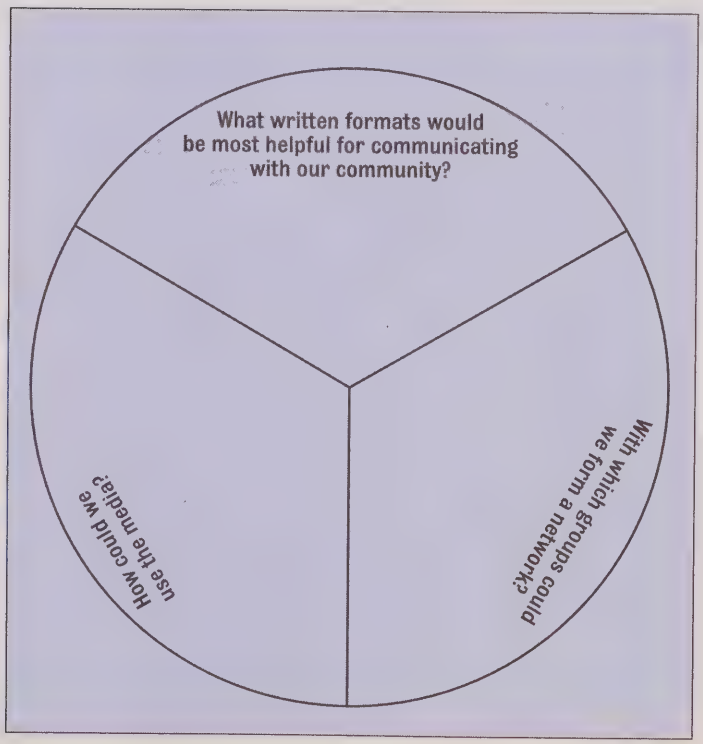
Brainstorming helps generate many creative solutions and strategies. "Round Robin" is a strategy for engaging members in discussion and making sure that everyone records and contributes ideas.

Directions

- A large circle is drawn on a piece of chart paper. This circle is then divided into three or more pie-shaped pieces. One question related to a topic under discussion is written in each piece of circle.
- Members form groups that contain the same number of members as there are pieces of circle. Each group is given a piece of chart paper on which it duplicates the original circle.
- Each group then selects one member to begin the round robin. That person chooses a piece of the circle, asks the question written in it, and records the responses of the other group members.
- The paper is then passed on to the next person and the process is repeated for the next piece of circle. This continues until group members have responded to all the questions. Two to three minutes should be allowed for each question.
- Each group then shares its results with the whole council. All the members decide which two or three responses are the most appropriate.

Example: Our Communication Strategies

- Use the round robin strategy to generate responses to the three questions in the circle below.
- Share your group's responses with all the other members. As a whole group, choose two or three responses to include in your communication plan.


What written formats would be most helpful for communicating with our community?
With which groups could we form a network?
How could we use the media?

Stop . . . Start . . . Continue

This strategy helps council members reflect on their work as a team.

Directions

- The chair provides each council member with a worksheet that states a topic related to the work of the council. The worksheet should also contain three columns with the following headings: Stop, Start, Continue.
- Council members respond, either at a meeting or between meetings, giving their reasons why the council should stop, start, or continue with the topic raised.
- Members' responses are then collected, collated, and shared with the whole group.
- The group then decides on actions that they can take to improve their teamwork.

Examples

The following are some examples of topics that might be used in this activity:

- Shared Decision-Making Processes
- Team Effectiveness
- Meetings

Four Corners

This strategy gives participants the opportunity to meet with others who share similar interests on a particular topic. It is a good way to share expertise within the council.

Directions

- The chair writes four topics of an issue under discussion on sheets of chart paper (one topic per sheet), posts one in each corner of the room, and asks participants to go to the corner that contains the topic that most interests them.
- The members in each corner record their viewpoints on the topic on the chart paper. Each group discusses the viewpoints recorded.
- Each group then shares the group's responses with all the members.

Note: Groups may rotate to other corners (and topics) if time is available.

Example: Effective Meetings

- The following four topics on the issue of effective meetings will be posted:
  1. Five things that team members should take responsibility for
  2. The five most irritating behaviours at meetings
  3. The five most important things that the chair can do
  4. Five ways to assess meetings
- Choose the topic that most interests you, record your viewpoints, and discuss with your group.
- Share your group's viewpoints with all the other members.

The ideas generated by this strategy could lead to the establishment of group norms for the council's meetings.

Snowball*

This strategy is most useful when a group that is dealing with many different points of view needs to come up with a single solution to a problem or agreement on an issue. It is very effective in helping the group build consensus.

Directions

- The chair outlines the task – to have the group reach agreement on one statement or set of ideas – and reviews the definition of *consensus*.
- Each council member is given an index card and asked to write his or her own ideas or statement related to the topic. Everyone is encouraged to be clear and succinct and to avoid the use of jargon.
- After everyone has completed this task, pairs are formed. Each pair is to reach agreement on one statement or set of ideas that satisfies both partners. If participants have difficulty, they should refer back to the definition of consensus.
- Each pair is then joined by another pair, and the consensus-building process begins again. The size of the consensus-building group continues to grow until every member agrees on one solution or statement. (As the groups form into eights, sixteens, and so on, it is helpful to have a facilitator for each group.)

Example: An Effective School Council

- Discuss the roles and responsibilities of the school council as described in Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 and your board's policy.
- In small groups, brainstorm for a list of things that an effective school council will be doing and saying in three years. Consider the perspective of *all* the partners – council members, school staff members, students, parents, trustees, and community members.
- Share your group's ideas with the whole council.
- Individually, write statements of vision for the council of twenty-five words or less; build on the ideas generated by the group discussion.
- Form pairs to share your statements and then create a new statement by combining your and your partner's best ideas. If possible, your statements should be no longer than twenty-five words.
- Form groups of four, then eight, and so on, continuing the process until the council arrives at one shared statement of vision. The final statement should be checked for clarity and meaning. Ask people who are not on the council what the statement means to them, and revise the statement if necessary to ensure that others receive the message your council intends. Your council should allow time for reflection before adopting the statement, and then should use the statement to help set its direction for the future.

*Adapted from Margaret Arbuckle and Lynn Murray, *Building Systems for Professional Growth: An Action Guide* (Andover, Mass.: The Regional Lab for Educational Improvement and Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services, 1989), p. 35.

Fist of Five*

This strategy is useful for checking quickly on how council members are feeling about a possible solution or decision. It can be used anytime during a decision-making process, when a check on progress is required.

Directions

- The chair makes a statement. Then the chair shows council members the following response chart (on an overhead or sheet of chart paper).
  - *One finger:* I cannot accept this solution/decision. If the council decides on it, I may have to leave the group.
  - *Two fingers:* I strongly disagree with this solution/decision and believe that it will have negative implications, but I will not sabotage the group.
  - *Three fingers:* The solution/decision does not make much difference to me.
  - *Four fingers:* I think that this solution/decision should be given a high priority and I will definitely contribute in some way.
  - *Five fingers:* This solution/decision is my first priority and you can count on my strong support.
- The chair asks council members to respond to the statement made by raising one to five fingers.

Examples

The following are examples of statements to which members can be asked to respond during a decision-making process:

- "It would be a good idea to have a committee of three develop the school council agenda."
- "To complete the discussion, it is suggested that our meeting time be extended by thirty minutes."
- "The council requires more information on the Education Act before it can reach a decision."
- "The development of a school profile should be given priority."

*Adapted from Carol Scearce, *100 Ways to Build Teams* (Palatine, Ill.: IRI/Skylight Publishing, 1992), p. 32. Available from IRI/Skylight Publishing Inc., 200 East Wood Street, Suite 274, Palatine, Illinois 60067, U.S.A.

Nominal Group Process

This process, which involves gathering and ranking many solutions to a particular problem, is often used to build consensus.

Directions

- The chair clearly identifies the issue, the problem, and the decision to be made, and asks members to record their ideas or responses on index cards.
- Each member is then asked to share his or her ideas with the whole council. All ideas are recorded on chart paper. The process continues until every member has contributed. Ideas may be clarified as they are presented or after all the ideas are on the chart. However, the intent of the clarification is to make sure that everyone understands the ideas, not to change or eliminate any.
- When all the ideas have been recorded and clarified, members are asked to rank the best four, five, or six (whatever number is suitable) on index cards. The total number of "votes" for each idea should be noted on the original list of ideas.
- The members then discuss the top three ideas and select the one they most support.

Sample Reverse Weight Chart

Roles Organizations	Council Member Ranking					Total
• Cultural Network	3	2	1	3	3	12
• Health Services	—	—	—	—	2	2
• Senior Citizen	2	3	—	1	1	7
• Chamber of Commerce	1	0	3	—	—	4
• Local Store Owner	0	1	2	—	—	3

Example: Selecting Community Representatives

- As a group, brainstorm for suggestions about possible community representatives, by role or organization (e.g., senior citizen; Chamber of Commerce, First Nations).
- Individually, select the three roles or organizations you think would best support the work of the council and the school. Be prepared to explain your choices.
- You will be given one or two minutes to share your first choice and reasons for the choice. (It is helpful to have one member record the choices and reasons on chart paper.) Other group members may ask you questions for clarification.
- Basing yourself on the sharing and discussion, individually select three roles or organizations you wish to have as community representatives.
  - Your first choice is ranked as a 3.
  - Your second choice is ranked as a 2.
  - Your third choice is ranked as a 1.
- With your group, prepare a Reverse Weight Chart (see the sample) and total individual rankings. Those roles or organizations ranked highest should be considered as the representatives to be chosen.
- Answer the question: "Can you live with these choices?" (Your chair will have to confirm that all the members of the group can live with these choices.)

Energizers

Energizers are strategies to help council members begin to build relationships and focus on the subjects under discussion. They can reinforce learning, place value on members as resources, and invite meaningful interaction in a safe, relaxed environment. Most energizers take between five and thirty minutes to complete. The following three energizers are described on pages 89 to 91:

- People Search
- Four-Corner Name Tag
- Treasure Hunt

All three energizers can be adapted to meet the needs of the council.

Energizer 1. People Search

This energizer will help council members get to know one another and become aware of how much they already know as a group.

Directions

- The chair asks council members to sign their names in each of the applicable squares on a chart such as the one below. (*Note*: Different descriptors may be used for the squares.)
- As a group, members *briefly* discuss what they learned about one another and themselves.

volunteers with a community group	plays a sport	uses a computer daily
speaks more than one language	has a pet	has chaired a meeting
knows the membership requirements of the school council, as outlined in PPM 122	has a child entering Kindergarten	grew up in a family of five or more
plays a musical instrument	reads or writes poetry	volunteers in a classroom

Energizer 2. Four-Corner Name Tag

This energizer will promote reflection and discussion on the role of school councils, as well as appreciation of council members' knowledge and experience.

Directions

- Members are given about five minutes to reflect on and respond to the four statements on the chart below.
- Members form pairs and share their ideas with their partners.
- As a whole group, members discuss the similarities and differences in their ideas.

Name _____ School _____

School councils provide an opportunity to . . .	School councils that make a difference for students will need . . .
The greatest challenge for a school council may be . . .	I can help a school council by . . .

Energizer 3. Treasure Hunt

This energizer will encourage council members to have fun while getting to know one another.

Directions

- The chair will ask council members to introduce themselves to other council members, being sure to introduce themselves to anyone they did not know previously.
- Members are to ask each person they meet to complete one of the statements listed below. It is not necessary to record the responses, only the names of the people responding.

Complete this statement	Name
The world would be a better place if _____.	_____
Co-operation is important because _____.	_____
When I relax I like to _____.	_____
My favourite book is _____ because _____.	_____
Helping others is _____.	_____
If I could teach everyone in the world one thing, it would be _____.	_____
I like to work with people who are _____.	_____
A person who taught me a lot is _____.	_____
My best "team" experience occurred when _____.	_____
I hope to contribute to the council by _____.	_____

Acknowledgements

The Ministry of Education and Training wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the many individuals and groups who participated in the development and validation of this handbook. The ministry wishes to thank, in particular, the representatives of the organizations listed below.

School Council Implementation Network Partners

Anti-Racism and Multicultural Educators' Network of Ontario (AMENO)

Black Educators' Workgroup (BEWG)

Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)

Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO)

Federation of Catholic Parent-Teacher Associations of Ontario (FCPTAO)

Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO)

Ontario Catholic Student Council Federation (OCSCF)

Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association (OCSOA)

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)

Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations (OFHSA)

Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC)

Ontario Principals' Association (OPA)

Ontario Parent Council (OPC)

Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)

Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA)

Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation (OPSTF)

Ontario Secondary School Students' Association (OSSSA)

Ontario Separate School Trustees' Association (OSSTA)

Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)

The Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF)

Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)

Association française des conseils scolaires de l'Ontario (AFCSO)

Association franco-ontarienne des conseils d'écoles catholiques (AFOCEC)

Association des agentes et agents de supervision franco-ontariens (ASFO)

Centre franco-ontarien de ressources pédagogiques (CFORP)

Fédération des associations de parents francophones de l'Ontario (FAPFO)

Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne (FJFO)

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Printed on recycled paper

ISBN 0-7778-5551-8

96-077